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COLONEL PLUNGER: or, The Unknown Sport.

A STORY OF LIFE AS IT IS ROUND THE CITY.

BY CAPTAIN FREDERICK WHITTAKER,

AUTHOR OF "NEMO, KING OF THE TRAMPS," "RED RUDIGER," "THE RUSSIAN SPY," "THE RED RAJAH," "THE IRISH CAPTAIN," "THE MAN IN RED," "DEATH'S HEAD CUIRASSIERS," "PHANTOM KNIGHTS," ETC., ETC.



"SIR, IF THE QUEEN AND JACK OF HEARTS ARE NOT UNDER YOUR HAND, I BEG YOUR PARDON."

Colonel Plunger;

OR,
THE UNKNOWN SPORT.

A Story of Life as it is Round the City.

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CHAPTER I.

IN THE POOL-ROOM.

"WALK up, gentlemen, and back your opinions. I'll give odds against every horse on the track. Money talks. Walk up, gents, and back your horses. Odds against them all."

The speaker was a stout, red-faced man, with a stentorian voice, a big diamond and a crimson satin scarf, which hid a dirty shirt. His heavy jowl and glossy black mustache, his brown velvet-cutaway coat and general sporting air, together with his position on a little platform beside a blackboard above the heads of the crowd, announced the professional gambler of the common kind, who ekes out a living on the fools of society on a capital of bounce and swagger.

The betting-room was full; the regular bookmakers were busy; the auctioneer was selling pools as fast as he could take the money; and the "Mutual" men were raking in five-dollar notes at half a dozen different windows.

The Grand Stand was full of ladies and the ground in front packed with people, while the quarter-stretch had its own crowd of well-dressed men, who made bets with each other and eschewed the outside world.

In the midst of this scene a pleasant-looking young fellow was making his way through the crowd toward the space in front of the Grand Stand, with the air of one well pleased with the world.

His face was handsome, frank and open, his attire fashionable, and altogether he looked like a man it would be agreeable to meet in society.

Moreover, every one seemed to know him and he to know them, for he nodded and smiled to dozens of men as he went on, and quite a buzz of comment followed him and the friends he was with.

From the space before the Grand Stand he passed on into the quarter-stretch, where he was greeted with even greater warmth.

It was evident the young man was a favorite.

"Ha, Noble, my boy, at it again?" said a gentleman with a heavy jaw, whose brown hair and mustache alone prevented him from being the counterpart of the vulgar bookmaker in the betting-room. "What's your judgment worth to-day? You know I'm bound to give you your revenge for last week."

The young man smiled carelessly.

"As much as you please on Ambition, Mr. Crooke. What odds do you give?"

"Six to one against him," said Crooke, with a twinkle of his dark eyes. "Put it as high as you please."

"Very well, then—ten thousand," was the equally determined reply. "If you win, I'm through for the season. If I win, we're quits."

Crooke hesitated a moment, and the younger man's lip curled.

"Going too heavy, am I?" he said. "I thought you'd be the last man to beg."

Crooke flushed angrily.

"Who's begging? I take the bet."

"Very well," replied Noble, and out came the books, in which the bet was duly recorded. Then Frank Noble sauntered away with his friends and Crooke went off toward the weighing paddock.

As they parted, a quiet, slender gentleman with eyeglasses turned to one of the club members, whose badge indicated him to be an officer on the course, and said with a slight foreign accent:

"Pardon, sare, but can you tell me who is dat young man in de light suit?"

The turfite nodded.

"Certainly. That's young Noble. They call him the Baby."

"De babee? Dat is strange, sare. Why is he so named? Pardon. I am but a stranger here."

The other looked at him a little sarcastically, for strangers are held in some contempt on race-courses.

A man a little above the medium height, and extremely thin, he was dressed in the tight-buttoned black frock that made him look still more slender, though there was a breadth to his shoulders that proved him to be a deceptive person as to physical strength.

His silk hat had a low black band, and his general appearance was almost clerical, for he had a white necktie and the glasses before mentioned.

The club man gave a little sniff, as he answered the question:

"They call him the Baby, because he doesn't know the world. Some call him the Pigeon,

because the old ones are plucking his feathers. Good-day."

And the club man turned on his heel and walked away, while the clerical-looking stranger bowed with great suavity, saying:

"I t'ank you, sare. You are very good."

Then he also walked away, but this time it was into the wake of the man who had bet with Frank Noble.

As he passed along, a good many people stared at him, for his appearance was one to attract attention anywhere. We have said that his dress was almost clerical in cut, but the mustache and imperial on his face were decidedly military, with waxed ends; and he carried a stout hooked cane hung over one arm by the crook, as he glanced round him in his quiet observant way.

Pretty soon he encountered Crooke, who was passing without notice, when the stranger stepped in his way, lifting his hat with the politest of smiles.

"Pardon me, sare, but I think I have known you before—in California."

Crooke's brown eyes shot forth a keen regard over the other's figure, and the heavy jaw closed firmly.

"You're mistaken, sir," he said, coldly. "I never was there."

"Ah, pardon," was the reply. "It is den only a resemblance, wonderful, but only a resemblance. I was mistaken."

And he stepped back with a bow as the other passed on.

Yet there was something in the face of Crooke as he went on that had altered from its usual dogged half scowl, and as he came to the railing that divided the quarter-stretch from the Grand Stand, he turned and glanced over his shoulder.

The quiet gentleman in black was still watching him; and, when he saw Crooke turn, he smiled and muttered to himself:

"It is Sharply: I knew it."

The quiet gentleman turned on his heel and walked away to where the jockeys were sauntering toward the weighing room, saddle in hand. As he passed one of them, who wore a lemon-colored silk jacket with a crimson sash, he said to him quietly:

"My boy—you vin dis race, I gif you five hundred dollar."

The boy looked up at him scornfully.

"Oh cheese it," he replied. "I've heard that afore, old man."

The clerical looking gentleman nodded.

"I mean it. You vill see me by de finish. If you are first, I gib it you on de course. More—my boy. If any one give you de money to lose, I double it to win. You see."

Here a man hurried up and took the boy by the arm, saying sharply;

"What are you about, Billy? Don't you know enough not to talk to strangers?"

As he spoke, he scowled fiercely on the man in black, who said smilingly:

"Pardon, my dear sare, it was no secret. I tell de boy I give him five hundred dollar if he win de race. Is dat wrong?"

The other looked at him sullenly.

"Mind your own business," was all he would answer, and he took the boy away.

The clerical looking gentleman turned to a bystander who looked interested.

"Dat man is very strange, sare. Is he de owner of de horse?"

"No, he's the trainer. The owner's over at the Grand Stand. It is Mr. Bloodgood."

"Bloodgood," echoed the stranger. "Dat is de banker, sare, is it not? He vas Governor."

"Yes, has good horses, and no mistake. But they don't win."

The speaker was a rotund, good natured cotton broker, not averse to talking.

"Dey do not win? And why not, sare?" asked the other innocently.

The cotton broker gave a shrug.

"Guess the ring's against them. You're a stranger here, I see."

"I am, sare, and I should be much pleased to receive some information from a gentleman of your politeness."

"Why, certainly, certainly," was the reply.

"Mr. ah—ah—"

"My card, sare."

And, with the politest of bows, the stranger handed the other a card, at which the broker looked.

"Colonel Plongeur—ah—a pretty good name for a race-course—eh. 'The Plunger.' We shall have to play you off against Crooke—call him the Boss Better. Happy to meet you, colonel. My name's Poynter—the boys call me 'Points,' on the cotton board—ha! pretty good for both of us—eh? Well, come, and take a drink. Horses won't start for ten minutes."

"With pleasure, sare."

And Colonel Plongeur stalked off to the bar with his new acquaintance, who was talking all the way, and pointing out the objects of interest.

When they had imbibed, the colonel insisted on cigars, and returned to the open ground with his new friend, whom he steered close under the place where Frank Noble was sitting in

the Grand Stand, beside a young lady, in the midst of a gay party.

"Can you tell me, sare," said the colonel, in his slow, precise way, "anything about dat young man up dere? He is dressed in a white flannel suit wid blue scarf and hat ribbon."

Poynter grinned.

"Well, you are a stranger, I swear. That's Frank Noble, they call the Lamb."

"De Lamb!"

"Yes; because he's losing his fleece so quick."

The colonel shook his head.

"Dey call him de Babee, de Pigeon, de Lamb. Why all dese name, sare?"

"Simple enough. You see, six months ago he was a clerk in a drygoods store. His mother was once an heiress, but ran away with an army officer called Noble. Father cut her off. Noble was killed on the Plains, and Mrs. Noble had a hard time taking care of the baby. Finally she died too, and old Malcolm relented so far as to give the boy a place in his store."

"Dis Malcolm, sare, who was he?"

"Rich old hunks. Funny: both his children turned out bad. Son took to gambling and horse-racing. Great boxer, fencer, pistol-shot. Spent money till the old man gave him his walking papers. Paul took them in a huff, went off to Mexico and got killed, they say, in one of their confounded revolutions. Anyhow, when the old man died Frank was next heir."

"I t'ank you, sare. But why is he called Babee, Pigeon, Lamb?"

"Simple enough. Money's turned his head, I suppose. Why, he's lost fifty thousand dollars to Crooke alone this season; and even old Malcolm's funds won't stand that forever."

"To Crooke? Dat is—"

"The Boss Better. Oh, he's got Frank in a good place to squeeze, and he's giving it to him."

The colonel looked up at the open, sunny face of the young man with interest.

"Pauvre diable!" he said, pityingly. "Can not some one save him? Who is dat ladie by his side?"

"That? That's Fanny Bloodgood, the heiress. They ought to be called the Babes in the Wood, Frank and old B. Old man will insist on running horses, though he don't bet. Never wins a race. Queer. Good stock too he runs. Aha! bell ringing. Now for the ponies! Let her rip! Six to one against Ambition, colonel."

"Pardon, sare, I nevaire bet," was the cold reply. "I come to watch de human nature, and de race, not to bet monee."

The broker shrugged his shoulders.

"Then you'll have to excuse me, colonel. I do; and make a good many bets after the start. Good-by."

And he was off through the crowd, while the suave colonel pressed to the front rank by the track, and almost stumbled on Crooke, who was standing near the finishing line, biting his lips and looking anxiously at the horses walking up to the score.

The colonel beamed over his shoulder with his glasses and saw the lemon-silk jacket of the jockey he had spoken to not more than twenty feet from the rail.

The boy was riding a tall bay horse with magnificent quarters and a beautiful head. He had drawn to one side from the rest and his horse was fidgeting with eagerness to be off, but not stirring from the line, while the other jockeys were trying their usual tricks to get the best of the start and the inside track.

The face of the boy was peculiar—dark, thin, eager, and prematurely old—and he was glancing at the course and the other racers with an anxious expression that showed he was by no means asleep.

The colonel said nothing, but quietly edged through the crowd till he was near the boy, after two false starts, and caught his eye.

At that moment the starter dropped his flag and the horses got away, the lemon jacket in the rear, but the colonel smiled to himself and muttered:

"The horse will do it. It's a three-mile race."

Then the horses vanished in a cloud of dust, going round the curve by the quarter-stretch, and when they came in sight again on the other side they were all in a bunch, with the lemon jacket nowhere to be seen.

Then the colonel sidled off again behind Crooke, and suddenly slapped him on the shoulder, crying:

"Why, Sharply, old boy, how are you?"

The other started violently, and the face he turned on the colonel was white as a sheet as he growled savagely:

"Who are you, confound your impudence? My name's not Sharply."

The colonel looked him in the eye steadily.

"Indeed, sare, it is de most wonderful resemblance. Wonderful!"

The other turned crimson.

"What do you mean? By heavens, I've a good mind to give you a—"

"What?" asked the colonel, folding his arms, one hand inside the breast of his coat and turning his left shoulder to Crooke.

The action was simple, almost imperceptible, but for all that Crooke's fist slowly unclenched and the colonel went on:

"I see you know the trick, Sharply. I once

brought down your partner with it. You have been in California."

Crooke grew pale, and without another word turned his back on the colonel, who smiled as he tapped him again on the shoulder.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE TRACK.

THE second tap brought no response, for at that moment the horses rushed past at the end of the first mile, and the crowd was too busy cheering to heed anything else.

As they passed, the colonel saw the lemon jacket about the middle of the string, still on the outside, the bay horse going easily, the boy sitting steadily.

A third time he tapped the Boss Better on the shoulder, saying:

"Sharply. Ambition will win this race."

Crooke turned round with a bitter scowl.

"Sir," he growled, "if you persist in annoying me I shall give you in charge."

The colonel smiled as imperturbably as ever.

"Ambition will win, for a thousand."

"Done, by heavens!"

The gambler's instinct could not be resisted, and out came the book.

"Done for ten, twenty, fifty thousand if you like!" he hissed. "I'll teach you to fool round me."

The colonel drew forth a similar book.

"Ten thousand be it," he said, quietly. "I have just that amount with me to lose."

The gambler hesitated a moment and took a long look over the course. The horses were on the other side of the track, and lemon jacket in visible.

"Done!" he said at last, and scribbled down the bet, till the colonel said quietly:

"You do not know me. What name you have put down?"

"Cash, by heavens!" said Crooke, fiercely; "and if I win I'll have it before I leave the course, or have you ruled off for a swindler."

"Den, my dear sare," was the quiet reply, "dey say vat is sauce for de goose is sauce for de gander. You vill pay if you lose, or I vill know de reason too."

Crooke turned his back again and looked across the track. The horses were coming to the end of the second mile, and the lemon jacket of Ambition's jockey could be seen fourth from the front.

He had become too anxious to bandy more words, and the colonel was close beside him.

As the horses passed in front of them the boy in the lemon jacket gave Ambition the whip, and the bay horse crept up to the second place at the beginning of the third mile. Even the veteran nerves of the Boss Better could not sustain him, and the color flickered on his cheek.

Away went the horses on the third and last mile, and very soon they could be seen on the opposite side of the track.

In front was a scarlet jacket, the lemon second, the rest behind in a ruck.

Both jockeys were using their whips freely, and lemon jacket was creeping up beside the scarlet.

Then the people began to shout:

"Ambition!"

"No, it's Sensation!"

"Sensation's ahead."

"No, it's Ambition!"

On came the horses till they had turned the last curve on the home stretch, when a great roar went up from the crowd.

"Sensation quits! Ambition wins!"

"Ambition wins!"

As the lemon jacket rushed past the winning-post a length ahead of Sensation, the colonel laid his hand on Crooke's shoulder, saying, quietly:

"Money down, Sharply. Money down."

Without a word, the Boss Better pulled out his pocket-book, and paid the other, then turned away to the Grand Stand, with his teeth set under his brown mustache; his face as white as a sheet, but serene and smiling.

He had lost seventy thousand dollars on a single race, for he had yet to pay Frank Noble, and he had not gained his name without showing his ability to lose as well as win.

He went up the stairs to the stand, whence the people were pouring toward the pool-rooms before the next race, and made his way to where Frank Noble was sitting in the midst of his gay party.

Miss Bloodgood, the heiress, looked rosy and happy. She was a pretty girl, and her father's horse had just won the race.

The face of the old gentleman bore an expression of calm satisfaction, and as Crooke approached he heard him say to Frank:

"No, my boy, not a cent but the prize-money. I never bet on a race. I run my horses for the pride of seeing them win, and I hold betting to be a practice unworthy of a gentleman."

Crooke heard him, and came down into the party, lifting his hat to the ladies.

"Good-day, Mr. Bloodgood," he observed, with a smile. "I'm sorry you don't approve of betting; for the gentleman to whom you were speaking backed your horse to win, as I am just realizing to my cost."

Mr. Bloodgood turned to Frank with a face decidedly grave.

"Is this true, Noble? I thought you had promised me not to—"

Frank had flushed deeply and stammered:

"I know it, sir, but at least I won. It's for the last time. Crooke will tell you that, had I lost, I had told him I was through for the season."

Crooke watched the young lady as he made his announcement, and saw that she looked troubled and anxious, while her father's gravity had become stern.

"Of course, Mr. Noble," he returned, coldly. "I don't presume to dictate to any young man the course he should pursue, but at the same time—"

He rose as he spoke, and made a sign to his daughter, who rose too, blushing deeply, as her father continued:

"At the same time, I am going to bid you good-afternoon. Fanny, my dear."

And the old gentleman marched away with his daughter on his arm, Frank Noble bowing profoundly as they went, his face pale as death, the young men who had come with him looking uneasily at each other till Crooke said:

"Well, Noble, I'm ready to settle. I owe you sixty thousand, don't I?"

The young man turned angrily on him:

"Confound the wager! I'd sooner have lost than had you blurt it out that way. You don't know what you've done."

Crooke looked surprised.

"Done! Why, you know it's my habit to settle up at once. Surely you don't object to receiving the money, do you?"

Noble ground his teeth impatiently.

"No, of course not. After all, it only makes us even. But why didn't you beckon me out? You know the Governor is opposed to betting, and I'd told him I was going to give it up. Confound it, one would think you did it on purpose to injure me."

Crooke turned to the other young men with an appealing gesture.

"Now, gentlemen, I ask you, is this fair to me? I owe a gentleman money on a bet, and I pay it openly; yet he complains that I injure him."

Then his tone became cajoling as he went on to Noble:

"Come, come, don't be down-hearted. It's not in human nature for Governor Bloodgood to remain angry with you for winning on his own horse. Here, take your money, and give me a chance on the next race."

As he spoke he drew out his pocket-book and counted out six bills into Noble's hand, adding quietly:

"Now we're even, and it's only fair to play the match out, like a rubber at cards. Do you back any horse in the next race?"

"No. I told you I'd done, win or lose. I'm going home."

And despite the remonstrances of his friends, home he went, while the Boss Better, for the first time in months, went to the betting-rooms and descended into the vulgar crowd round the bookmakers.

In the mean time the suave and clerical-looking Colonel Plongeur had been lost in the crowd down below the Grand Stand, after a short interview with Ambition's jockey, and no one had noticed him, though he had been watching the group round Frank Noble with much interest.

He saw it break upon the arrival of Crooke, and noted the change in the old gentleman's manner as he took away his daughter. He saw, too, the payment of the bet, and muttered to himself:

"So much rescued from his clutches. Now for my other plan."

As he spoke he went through the crowd toward the steps of the Grand Stand, and met Noble coming down, looking decidedly out of temper and unhappy.

The colonel allowed him to pass, and then followed him, unnoticed, through the crowd, till he saw him get into a fancy English dog-cart, with a big gray horse, and drive off, with no one but a groom behind.

The colonel went out of the gate at once himself, and took the train back to the city, watching the road all the way.

Every time the train stopped he scanned the road eagerly, and every time he saw the gray horse and the dog-cart driving along before or behind the train; for it had about fifteen minutes' start, and the horse seemed to be a good one.

At the terminus he got out and hurried at once to a livery-stable, where he said:

"Give me a buggy and driver, quick. I want to go to New York at once, and the man can bring back the horse. Ten dollars if he's ready inside of three minutes."

Before two minutes were up the colonel was seated in the vehicle and slowly driving out of the archway into the street.

"Where to, sir?" asked the driver.

"Give me the reins, and ask no questions," was the reply.

At that moment the gray horse came into sight, and drove past the stable, when the colonel gave his horse the whip and followed it,

street after street, till they came to the Fulton Ferry; and when the dog-cart drew up on the boat, the hired buggy was close behind it.

On the New York side, again, the colonel followed all the way to Madison Square and saw the dog-cart draw up in front of the Brunswick Hotel, when the young man threw the reins to the driver and got out, entering the house.

The colonel drove on, apparently without noticing, and turned round the block, when he paid and dismissed his driver, saw the latter, completely mystified, drive away, and then walked round to the entrance of the Brunswick and strolled in.

The lobby was nearly empty of people, and the colonel went up to the desk and looked over the register, as if searching for a name.

Apparently he saw it not; for he asked the clerk politely:

"Pardon, sare, but is dere not a gentleman called Noble stopping here?"

The gorgeous gentleman looked at him in the usual supercilious manner of his class:

"Yes, he is."

"Is de gentleman in?"

"Couldn't say. Send your card in."

And the clerk returned to his toothpick.

The colonel sent in his card, and pretty soon the waiter came back to usher him into a hand some suite of rooms, where he found Frank Noble in a brown study, smoking a cigar and looking gloomily out of the window, so much absorbed in his thoughts that he allowed his visitor to stand unnoticed until the colonel coughed delicately.

Then the young man flushed and started, saying, hastily:

"I beg your pardon, sir. I did not observe you at first. Pray be seated. What can I do to serve you? Have a cigar?"

The colonel had been eying him closely as he spoke, and now he bowed, saying:

"I thank you, sare. I will sit down."

He took a seat, laid his hat on a table, and hesitated a little before he proceeded.

"You are, I believe, de son of de late Captain Noble of de army in dis country?"

"I am, sir," replied the young man, quietly.

"And your fader was—pardon if I pain—he was killed on de plains?"

"Yes, sir, I was only two years old then."

"Precisement. Two year old. I did know your fader, monsieur."

Frank rose impulsively.

"A friend of my father's? Be mine, then. Ah, sir, I don't remember him, but I have heard my poor mother speak of him too often not to know he was a good and brave man. Where did you know him, sir? Were you in our service?"

"No, monsieur, no. I was in de service of France, when your fader was young man."

"Indeed?" interrupted Frank, eagerly. "Then you knew him when he went to Algiers with Kearney of course?"

"I see him dere, monsieur," replied the colonel, tranquilly. "I was struck ven I see you to-day wid de resemblance to my poor friend. You were like him—how old are you, sare?"

"Twenty-five."

"Yes, I see. Well, monsieur, I am happy to see de son of my old friend again. Hope to see you often. I am alone in de city, and I should like to have a friend to show me de lion, you know. I am an old soldier, but I need de guide in de strange place."

"Ah! then you are here on business?"

"No, sare, plaisir solely. I am getting old, and I wish to enjoy life. You have vat dey call club here, like in Europe?"

Frank smiled.

"Certainly. Should be very happy to show you mine, any time. In fact, I've invited quite a number to dine with me to-night. Hope you will join us—ah—"

"Plongeur, Colonel Plongeur," was the smiling reply.

"At vat hour do you dine, monsieur?"

"Well, we're pretty dissipated, I admit," said the young man, with a sort of half laugh, "and don't sit down till seven, you know. It's the English custom. We're getting terribly English here?"

The colonel snailed quizzically.

"Yes, sare, you are even more so dan de English demselves. De address is—?"

"Oh, never mind the address," returned the young man, heartily. "I couldn't let you go away, you know. I've a hundred, a thousand questions to ask about my poor father, if you'll answer. I'll take you there."

"But your dinner will be full dress, sare?"

"Oh, no, quite informal, I assure you," said Frank, coloring slightly. "You see, the fact is, we are to have quite a funny sort of a party there. You're not a sporting man, colonel?"

"No, sare, I am quite vot you call green in dis countree—is dat it?"

Noble laughed.

"Indeed? Then perhaps you may object to meeting sporting characters?"

"No, no, sare. I am student of human nature, and I like to see all kind. It is, I suppose, an opera dancer, singer, rider in circus—eh? Young men vill be young men?"

And the colonel smiled slyly.

But Frank shook his head, coloring slightly.

"No, no, you're wrong. It's not a woman at all! I like excitement, but not that kind. No, this is a man—in fact quite a remarkable one—the best boxer we've seen for many a year in this country. They call him the 'Knocker Out,' because he licks every man he faces."

The colonel scratched his nose.

"Indeed! A prize-fighter? And he is to dine wid you gentlemen. Hum!"

CHAPTER III.

THE KNOCKER OUT.

FRANK NOBLE laughed again, but in rather an uneasy manner.

"You see I like excitement, colonel; in fact I live on it. It's such a change from the old hum-drug life I used to lead. Probably I inherit my father's disposition. He was a born soldier, they say. Do you think I look like him?"

"I t'ink so, sare."

"But I've been told I look more like my poor mother. That is her portrait, over yonder, enlarged from an old photograph, the only one I had that was good."

The colonel turned toward the picture, and in doing so kept his back to the young man.

Any one on that side might have seen the gray mustache twitch slightly, but he made no remark save:

"Dat was madame v're mere. I t'ank you, sare."

Then he entered into general conversation on the subject of Captain Noble, and began to tell all sorts of anecdotes of war on the other side the ocean, till in a pause of the dialogue, he remarked:

"Do you know, sare, dat seeing you in dis room remind me of a young friend I once had in Paris. He was about your age, and he, like you, had de portrait of *madame sa mere* in his room. But he was very wild, dey call it here. He go to race, he bet, he gamble, he lose de money like de water. You do not do dat, of course. No, no, dat is impossible. But dis young man do all dat. And yet de time come, one day, when dat portrait save him from de ruin."

Frank had been growing red during this speech, and answered in a low tone:

"Indeed, how was that, colonel?"

"Sare, it was dis way. One day he lose money very much, and *monsieur son pere*—his fader—grow tire of paying his debts, and send him a letter to say dat he could do no more for him. He was of age. He must pay himself. And den, sare, de creditor come on dat young man, and he haf to leave France. He pay one last visit to his room, de night before he depart, and what t'ink you, de only t'ing he take away?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, colonel."

"It was his mother's portrait," answered the colonel in a deep, solemn tone. "It was small, not like yours, and he told me in after years, it seemed to be looking at him beseechingly. For the first time in his life the young man said to himself, 'What would she say to all I have done?' Like your mother, she was dead. Well, he went away—but I tire you, sare?"

"No, no," said Frank, eagerly. "Go on. What happened to him afterward?"

"He became a soldier, sare. He did not know how to work, and it was his only hope to retrieve de past by making his way to a post of honor. Ten years after, sare, I bury dat young man, wid de cross of de Legion on his breast, and France call him a hero. From de day he take to look at dat portrait and say at night to himself, 'Would she like to see me to-day?' he go up, up, instead of down, down. De play, de pleasure, ruin de young man. De portrait of his mother make him a hero. Sare, dat was a true storee."

Frank had thrown aside his cigar to listen, and the tears stood in his eyes as the colonel finished.

"Thank you for the story," he said, earnestly. "I know I've been going it too fast. I must pull up some time, and I may as well do it now. I've almost made up my mind to do it, anyhow. I wish I hadn't to go to this dinner at the club to-night. I believe I'll make it the last thing of the kind."

The colonel looked at him keenly, and then took up a cigar from the table and lit it.

"My dear sare," he said, quietly, "you must do as does de rest of de world; dat is, you must work out your own salvation."

Then he puffed away quietly, the face of the young man working, revealing the struggle going on in his mind, for Frank Noble was open as the day, and could hide nothing.

He was almost breaking out into a fit of confidence, when a loud knock came at the door and into the room burst the Boss Better, Crooke, and several young men, who were all flushed with excitement and drink, as Crooke cried out:

"Hallo, Noble, counting your gains? Never mind, old fellow, I got square on the crowd before the end of the races. I'm not more than a thousand out now, and I'll make that up next week. Here's Riley all ready for his feed and the match too."

He had not noticed the colonel, who sat half

hidden in the deep arm-chair, and the other young men were equally careless, as they grouped round Noble while Crooke rattled on with his hand on the arm of a tall, broad-shouldered young man, with a hard bony face and glittering dark eyes, set close together.

Frank Noble rose a little awkwardly, and welcomed his friends, shaking hands with the bony-faced young man, who said in a deep bass voice:

"Good arf, good arf. Pleased to make your acquaintance, mister."

Then Noble turned to Crooke.

"A friend of mine, Crooke. He will join us at dinner. Gentlemen, Colonel Plongeur, of the French army, an old friend of my father's. Colonel, Mr. Crooke, Mr. Riley, Mr. Courtland, Mr. Kettleton, Mr. Howard Smith. Help yourselves to cigars, boys." The colonel had risen, and was bowing with his usual suavity to the party, who responded in the usual way, all but Crooke. The Boss Better looked at the colonel sullenly, nodded slightly, and turned away to the table for a cigar, preserving a total silence.

Mr. Riley, the great Knocker Out, shook hands with the stranger, a peculiar smile on his lips, and retained hold of the other's hand for several seconds, looking him in the eye.

The colonel met the gaze with his usual smile, though his face turned a shade redder than usual, and he set his teeth under his gray mustache.

The fact was that the prize-fighter, after the fashion of a good many strong bullies, was trying to squeeze his hand, and the veteran was resisting him.

When the knocker out at last released his grasp, he said approvingly:

"Happy to meet ye, colonel. You're what we calls a deceivin' coon."

The colonel smiled.

"Dat is a compliment, monsieur. You are very powerful man. Dere is a match at de boxe for you to-night, aha?"

"Yes," returned the Knocker Out indifferently. "They've brought a fellow over from the other side to spar me, and I'm a-goin' to knock him out in four rounds, I am. Do you want to put any money on me?"

"My dear sare," returned the colonel placidly, "I am vat you call green in dis countree. I would like to see de oder man first."

Riley grinned.

"Oh, you're a deceivin' coon, you are. I shouldn't wonder but what you could put up your hands yourself at a pinch."

The colonel laughed.

"Eh mon ami, vat I know of de boxe? I t'ank you very much. No. I study de human nature—dat is all."

"Human natur'," echoed Riley, puzzled. "Don't know nothin' 'bout it."

"My dear sare dat is where—pardon me—you make great mistake. A man of your profession should study it all de time, or he vill find de time when he will be deceive in de oder man."

And then the colonel went and sat down again, while the conversation became general.

He himself took no part in it; but sat a little retired from the group watching it and every member through his glasses, especially Crooke, who seemed uneasy under his observation.

The Boss Better, however, talked on in a way that showed him to be a man of the world and successful with young men, for they all seemed to look up to him as a sort of sporting oracle in the room.

Pretty soon it came out that the prize-fighter Riley had been ordered by his trainer not to attend the club dinner, as at first proposed, and that Crooke had come to announce the fact and propose a postponement till after the match.

"Make it a supper instead, Frank. It'll be better fun when we bring Riley in a conqueror. He can drink then."

"Is dat—pardon me—necessary, sare?" asked the precise tones of the colonel.

Crooke turned on him with a sneer.

"Is what necessary?" he asked.

"Dat Monsieur Riley should drink?"

"Of course. What's life without drinking? Don't you drink?" asked Crooke rudely.

"Certainly, monsieur; for dat we all do. But I do not get too much."

"Nuther do I," growled Riley sternly.

The colonel smiled.

"Of course not, monsieur. I have no intention to reflect on you—"

"You'd better not," growled Riley in the same stern way. "I've seen fellers like you took down for bein' too smart."

In a moment young Noble was on his feet, and cried sharply to Riley:

"You forget yourself, sir. This gentleman is my father's friend and mine. You must not insult him. Do you understand?"

The prize-fighter looked up and scowled. He had a hard, cruel face at the best, but now it looked perfectly diabolical.

The other young men had risen up, with pale faces. They began to realize that the honor of entertaining the first boxer in America might be purchased too dearly, if the boxer chose to be ugly.

Riley retained his seat, and looked up at the young man.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked in his deep bass tones. "I ain't insultin' no one. Mr. Crooke brought me here—"

"And Mr. Crooke will take you out at once," cried Frank resolutely. "You'll have to understand that when men of your class come among gentlemen they have to behave themselves. You have insulted my friend, and you'll apologize or leave the room."

The blue eyes of the gentleman looked fearlessly down into the dark glittering orbs of the professional ruffian, and the prize-fighter saw that Frank was not afraid of him.

He had a match on, that evening, on which much money depended, and like all his class, he had no feelings to hurt.

"I did not mean to insult no one," he said more politely. "I ain't got nothen ag'in' you or the other gent. Let it drop, sir. I'm a professional, and don't want to fight no one."

"Very well then," said Frank sharply. "You keep a civil tongue in your head when you come into my rooms. Do you hear?"

The colonel had gathered himself into his chair watching both men intently, and he saw that the boxer was struggling to keep down his temper.

Frank's peremptory tone irritated him, and it was in a manner indicating suppressed anger that he answered:

"Yes, I hear, plain enough."

Frank turned away for a moment, and Riley half rose in his chair with the look of a demon, as if to attack the other, when Crooke, who had grown very pale, cried out:

"For heaven's sake, Riley, consider! You can't afford to be arrested to-night."

The boxer heard and subsided instantly; but the look on his face was as savage as ever as he growled:

"Then why did ye bring me here? I'm a-goin', and let them as wants trouble look out fur me, arter to-night. I ain't dead yet."

So saying he rose up, and slouched to the door, when Frank Noble, who heard the last words, strode after him and laid his hand on his shoulder, crying:

"What do you mean by that?"

The colonel started up, his eyes flashing with excitement and muttered under his breath:

"The boy's game! Good!"

As for the boxer, he turned fairly green, and his white teeth shone as he hissed:

"You know I can't fight till the match is over. I'll give you all you want to-morrow."

"Do you mean to say you dare threaten me?" shouted Frank fiercely. "Do you think, because you're a prize-fighter, you can bully me in my own rooms? You'll fight now, or never. What do I care for your match?"

The Knocker Out ground his teeth savagely, and turned to strike, when Crooke seized hold of Frank and dragged him back.

"You fool, he'll kill you with one blow," he panted.

"Are you a lunatic?"

And as all Frank's friends gathered round him, the prize-fighter turned away with a scornful curse, saying as he went out:

"I don't ask no odds of none of ye."

As soon as he was gone, Crooke began to assume the tone of a mentor.

"Are you crazy to want a difficulty with a man like that? I'm amazed at you, Frank. Why, he'd knock you dead with one blow."

"And do you mean to say," cried Frank, "that you brought that fellow to my rooms to bully me? He insulted my friend."

Crooke patted him soothingly.

"No, no, he didn't mean to do it. He's a rude fellow, but he means no harm, only you are so hot-headed."

"Pardon me, sare," said the voice of Colonel Plongeur, "you are wrong in one t'ing."

"In what?" asked Crooke, puzzled.

"In saying dat man mean no harm, my dear sare. He did mean harm. I know dat type well; dey are bully. Dey t'ink dey can do what dey please. I am old soldier, and I watch de scene close. I am proud of de boy here. Aba, dat is what dey call game in England."

And the colonel patted Frank's shoulder affectionately, while Crooke sneered:

"Game! Oh, yes, game enough, but a fool, too. What's the use of game against a man like that? I suppose you think you could fight him?"

The colonel gave a shrug.

"Fight dat cattle? No, sare. I fight only my equal. Dat kind I kill if dey cross my path. You understand!"

And, as he spoke, the colonel walked up to Crooke, and looked him straight in the eye with a singular expression.

Frank, who had cooled off from his first flush of anger, noticed them with some curiosity, and saw that Crooke was uneasy under the colonel's gaze.

"Oh, if you mean to shoot him," he said, turning away, "I suppose you can; but I tell you he's a dangerous man if you ever miss."

"I have lived among dangerous men, my dear sare," was the tranquil reply. "I am use to dem. I tell you, if you do not want to see your boxair-spoil, so he box no more, you tell him to leave Monsieur Noble alone. *Vous comprenez?*"

Crooke turned away uneasily.

"Why do you talk to me? I don't keep the man. He's no friend of mine."

"Pardon, sare, I imagined he was."

And the colonel resumed his seat and his cigar, smiling placidly to himself, while the conversation languished, for every one felt uncomfortable after the scene just passed.

Frank, as host, was first to recover his cheerfulness, for he said:

"Come, boys, it serves us right for associating with such fellows. Let's go somewhere else to-night. After all, there's plenty to do without going to see a boxing match. I propose a visit to the theater."

"Pardon," again interposed the colonel, "but did you not tell me, *mon ami*, dat you were to dine at de club?"

"Yes, with Riley for guest, and go to his match afterward. But, after the way the blackguard's behaved, and the threats he's made, I'm hanged if I'll go."

"And dat is just de reason, my dear boy, dat you must go," responded the colonel.

Crooke started slightly, and looked at him.

"Why?" asked Frank.

"Because if you do not go, people will say you are afraid, and you cannot afford dat," was the quiet reply. "You must go and show yourself till de match is over. We have saying in France, '*Noblesse oblige*.' You are son of Noble. You must go. I go wid you, and see no harm come."

Frank colored.

"Oh, I don't want any one to take care of me," he said lightly. "I can do it myself."

The colonel twirled his mustache.

"*Mon ami*, you are young. Take de advice of old friend of your fader. Dere is great difference between courage and folly. You do not know de world. I am old soldier. I go wid you."

"Ay, ay," remarked Howard Smith, uneasily, "if we must go, Frank, let's go ready for mischief. There will be a rough crowd at the match, and it's the easiest thing in the world for them to get up a fight."

"Take the colonel with us," said young Kettleton. "By Jove, Frank, that fellow had an ugly look on his face as he went out. He may lay for you in the hall now."

The colonel shook his head.

"No, no, you do not know these men. It is with them a matter of money. Dey make de living dat way. You need not fear till after de match is over."

"And then?" asked Courtland.

"Den, my dear sare, if our friend win, de citie will not hold him. I have seen dem men before, all puffed up wid vanitee. Dere was—"

He stopped suddenly.

"I forgot. I was t'inking of *maitres d'armes*. De boxe may be different."

Frank laughed.

"Well, colonel, for a greenhorn, as you call yourself to me, I must say you talk more like an old sport than any I ever met. But we'll go over to the club now, and have an earlier dinner."

And the party left the chambers and went over to the gorgeous club-house, where they dined sumptuously before going to the grand boxing match.

Colonel Plongeur drank nothing but water at the table, and watched every thing keenly, especially Crooke and Noble. He saw that the young man drank freely, while the old one only sipped, and he heard a good deal of talk among the young men about playing poker, from which he opined that such was their habit after dinner.

For that night, however, there was no time for poker, for the match was at half past eight, and as soon as they had smoked an after dinner cigar they sauntered down to the building where it was to take place.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MATCH.

THE building in which the great boxing match was to take place was only a few squares from the club, and the whole party concluded to walk, the night being fine. On the way they fell into groups, and it was not till they reached the door of the edifice to which they were bound that Kettleton suddenly exclaimed:

"Where's Crooke? By Jove, he's given us the slip. He was here a minute ago."

They looked round, and, sure enough, the Boss Better had disappeared, while no one had noticed where he went. At least none of the young men.

Colonel Plongeur, for all that he had to wear glasses, was not so unobservant. As they passed into Madison Square, he had noticed a carriage drive slowly by them under the glare of the electric lights, and had seen a handkerchief waved from the window to some one in their party.

Almost instantly Crooke had halted in the rear of the party, under pretense of lighting his cigar, and the colonel had seen him slip round the corner into a side street, just as that identical carriage turned out of the square at the same pace. But the veteran said nothing on the subject, and after a few aimless conjectures, the young men entered the huge shed

dignified by the title of the "Garden," and proceeded to the box which Frank Noble, with the careless extravagance of youth, had purchased at auction, days before, for more than a hundred dollars.

They found the building full of people, a buzz of conversation audible everywhere, and in the midst of the huge amphitheatre where so many athletic contests had taken place, was erected a board platform, with the familiar rope fence round it.

The colonel scanned the gathering through his glasses, and sat at the back of the box, where he could watch Frank and his friends.

He saw the young man nodding and smiling to dozens of people, but he took little notice apparently, till all at once he started slightly and his gaze became riveted on a box at the other side of the house.

In that box he beheld the saturnine face of Crooke, the Boss Better, and by his side was a richly dressed and beautiful *lady*. Not that the fact of a lady being present at a boxing match in New York was such an anomaly; for, strange to say, there were at least a hundred of them dotting the black sea of men round the house, but the woman beside Crooke was of the kind that would be noticed anywhere. Dark, slender, and elegant, her face had all the beauty—dangerous but brilliant—of the Spanish Gipsy, and her attire, while bright in color, was so exquisite in taste, that one would not call it loud or vulgar, though it was decidedly odd and picturesque.

Kettleton and Courtland, who were sweeping the house with opera-glasses, presently made the same discovery, as the colonel, and the young men began to speculate on what "old Crooke was doing with that woman in the box."

"By Jove, boys! she's a stunner," said Howard Smith, enthusiastically. "I wonder who she is? Looks like an actress; but I don't know her face."

"Crooke's a sly one," said Kettleton.

"Confounded sly one!" assented Courtland. Frank Noble alone said no word, and did not seem to notice much.

The colonel, watching him, saw that he had a weary discontented air, as if nothing could please him, and the veteran said to himself as he gazed:

"There is a woman in this. He has quarreled with that girl I saw him with—the heiress. I must find out why."

But pretty soon the thoughts of all were directed to the coming match, as the great "Knocker Out," accompanied by his friends and backers, ascended the platform, followed by thunders of applause.

The burly gladiator never looked better in his life than he did when he threw off the long, brown duster in which he was muffled and made his appearance in all the glory of ring costume.

Enthusiastic men began to shout wild bets on his prowess as they gazed on his tall form, saw the big, bulging muscles that stood out all over his body, and noted the fierce, cruel look on his face.

Even Frank was carried away by the excitement, and turned round, saying:

"Isn't he grand, colonel? Look at that torso, and the lines of muscle on his limbs! The man looks like a statue."

The colonel smiled a little scornfully.

"De man is a fine animal, but he is not as strong as a mule. My dear sare, I do not admire man for size alone. It is de brain make de man."

"But you don't need brains in a fight," broke in Kettleton, a little pertly. "Muscle wins."

The colonel looked at him compassionately.

"My dear sare, you are young. It is a common mistake. We will wait till we see de oder man."

At this moment fresh rounds of applause announced the coming of the other party to this singular contest, and a square-built, chunky personage, with a broad face, full of good-nature and cunning, came on the platform and took his seat in the corner, likewise in ring costume.

The colonel looked at him keenly, and in a moment more said to Kettleton:

"De big man will not knock out de leetle one, my dear sare."

"For how much?" asked the youth, eagerly.

The colonel waved his head.

"Not to you, sare, not to you. If it was Monsieur Crooke I say yes, but not to you. Keep your money. You lose him."

At this moment a short man with a loud voice roared from the platform:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I take pleasure in introducing to your notice Mr. Riley, the champion of America, and Mr. Toughey, from the other side of the water. Mr. Riley thinks he can knock Mr. Toughey out of time in four rounds, and Mr. Toughey says he don't believe he kin. They're going to try it now; and I know I speaks the sentiments of every one in this here building when I says: 'Let the best man win.' They'll go at it now."

A roar of applause followed the homely address, the stout gentleman retired from the ring, and the champions put on the boxing

gloves and eyed each other with much curiosity.

The English Toughey was shorter by nearly a head, but his body was set together like that of a bull, close and firm, and he had a confident look on his face as he watched his huge foe. A moment they stepped back and forth, when, with a sudden rush, the short man planted a stinging blow on the nose of the "Knocker Out," and jumped away, laughing.

For one instant the giant seemed paralyzed with astonishment and rage; then he rushed in with a perfect tempest of blows, under which the short man went down on the platform, battered on head and shoulders.

In a moment he was up again, retreating, dodging, falling again and again, but always up before the referee could call time, and when the round ended he went back to his corner and sat down, his broad face, shoulders and neck red with the blows he had received, but otherwise quiet, and not out of breath at all.

His antagonist, on the other hand, sat on his chair panting heavily, his dark face pale and savage; but it was obvious that he had overexerted himself in the round, and was already winded.

In the second round he dashed in with the same reckless fury, and fought Toughey all over the stage, but before long the short man had closed in where the blows took less effect, and hung on to the giant like a bulldog; going down only when he received a blow in the face, with a quickness that showed he was anxious to escape punishment.

Five times he was knocked down in this round, but each time he came up again smiling; and, when he finally retired to his corner, the flush had gone from his face, and one might see that all the punishment had fallen on the top of his head or his shoulders.

The colonel looked at Kettleton:

"Well, sare, you see de head is some use even in a fight. Dat man could not guard de blow, so he take dem where dey hurt de least. And your champion. Look."

In fact the champion looked the worse of the two men, though his face was more ferocious than ever. His tremendous work had almost exhausted him, and he had only two rounds more in which to fulfill his boast, or own himself beaten under the terms of the match.

"If Toughey stands two more rounds," said Courtland, thoughtfully, "our friend Crooke will be out of pocket."

"Aha?" asked the colonel, "is dat so, sare?"

"Yes, I know he backed the champion."

The colonel smiled and glanced over at the Boss Better, who sat unconcernedly in his box, as if he had no interest in the match.

He had not won his name without deserving it, win or lose.

The third round was marked by more weakness on the part of the champion, while Toughey, on one or two occasions, got in a vicious dig on his antagonist's body, low down and near the belt, taking blows on the top of his own head unflinchingly.

When the round closed Toughey lay on the stage and let his seconds carry him to his stool, while the champion walked to his corner unaided.

But people noticed that he tottered as he walked, while the Englishman was on a broad grin.

The house grew as still as death in the fourth round, and here to the amazement of all, Toughey took the initiative and managed to punch his big foe severely, while the champion's blows were badly directed, and there was some blood on his upper lip.

And the fourth round showed that the great "Knocker Out" had done his best, and had little more left in him.

When it closed, Toughey walked to his corner laughing, and at the call of time jumped up and came to the scratch.

The match was over. The "Knocker Out" had failed to knock out "Toughey."

The job was too tough, even for him.

Ten minutes later, the crowd was slowly streaming out of the building, and the colonel said quietly to Frank:

"I will bid you good-night, sare. I am charm to have seen you, and hope to do it again. I take my leave now."

"And where are you stopping?" asked Frank.

"I'm very glad to have seen you to-day; and to have heard of my poor father. You must come again. Why not breakfast with me tomorrow?"

The colonel shook his head.

"Impossible, sare. I have an engagement. I shall see you again soon. In de mean time, take de advice of old soldier. Do not trust Monsieur Crooke, and you will be a richer man next year. Good-night."

And the colonel vanished into the crowd so hastily, that, not till he was gone, did Frank remember that he had not told him where he lived.

However, he was not of the age to bother himself much on that score, and he felt, since his quarrel of the morning with the Bloodgoods in that resentful mood in which he only panted for excitement to drown thought.

So he and his friends went back to the club, where they called for cards; and there we must leave them, while we follow the mysterious Colonel Plongeur, who had come so suddenly on the scene and seemed to know so many people.

The colonel had an object in leaving his young friend so suddenly, for he only went a few feet off into the crowd, when he took up his station by a post and began to watch the people coming out.

He kept hidden in the crowd and presently saw those he waited for.

The Boss Better, his head turned away, was coming out with the dark lady; and the colonel fell in behind them and followed them to the curbstone, where lines of hacks were waiting; for private carriages were not to be expected at a boxing match.

The colonel saw they were about to enter one, and he instantly went to the next in the line, stepped in and whispered to the driver.

"Follow the carriage with the gray horses and drive slowly past it when it stops. Keep your mouth shut, you understand?"

As he spoke he thrust a bill into the man's hand, and Jehu winked slyly.

"All right your honor," he said in a low tone, as he shut the door.

Then he climbed slowly on his box and drew out of the line following the other carriage without attracting any attention, and they drove off down several streets, till the colonel saw the gray horses draw up before a well known hotel, at the ladies' entrance.

He called to his own driver.

"Go round to the other side, and wait."

It was noticeable as he spoke that his foreign accent had disappeared entirely, but he resumed it the moment he was in the hotel, where he went to the desk and looked over the register.

He was hunting for a lady's name, and the gleam of his eye soon showed that he had found it, for he said to the clerk.

"Dat ladee, Madame St. Aure, she was in, you t'ink, sare?"

"No, sir," said the night clerk, who was a wonder of politeness, as compared with his brother of the day. "She went out to see the boxing match. Funny taste for a lady, but it's a fact. Took a box and went with her agent."

"Thank you, sare, I will not wait," said the colonel politely.

Then he went out, got into his hack, and drove away to a quiet little side street, in a quarter where furnished rooms were to let in all directions.

Here he dismissed the driver at the corner, and went down the street to a dark house, into which he entered with a latch-key.

"I wonder if the boy has got here yet?" he said to himself as he walked up-stairs. "If he's like other boys he'll come. If he doesn't it will be because Sharply has got at him."

He went to a room where a light shone through the open doorway, and there with his head resting on his folded arms, by a table, fast asleep, was the very boy who had ridden Ambition that day and to whom the colonel had promised five hundred dollars if he won the race.

Out of his jockey dress, in a neat gray suit, and fast asleep, his face had lost that air of preternatural sharpness that had distinguished it on the course.

Asleep, he looked like any other boy, a little more sad and weary; but that was all.

The colonel scanned him carefully, muttering:

"I'm glad he's asleep. Sleep never lies. He has an honest look now. I believe I can trust him. It was a strange chance brought him in my way."

He watched him a little longer, and then touched him on the shoulder softly.

Instantly the lad woke up with a start, and came broad awake at the same time. His face resumed its prematurely old, cunning expression, and he said:

"Well, boss, here I am. I thought ye was never comin'."

"Then why did you go to sleep?" asked the colonel quietly. "If I was never coming, why did you not go home?"

"'Cause I'd said I'd come," returned the boy. "You treated me square, and I'm square too. Ef the guv'ner had let me ride his horses afore to-day, he'd been better off, but he kep' sayin' stable boys warn't no use. Got to hev jocks—jocks!" he repeated scornfully. "Half o' them as call theirselves jocks, don't know's much of the horses as we boys. Well, mister, now I'm here, what d'y'e want?"

"First to know your name," said the colonel, still watching him keenly.

"My right name is Charles Wandle, boss, but they don't never call me by it. They allers calls me Billy Boots, the jock."

CHAPTER V. BILLY BOOTS.

THE colonel laughed.

"Dat is funny; your name is Charles, and dey call you Billee. Who gave you dat name Billee?"

The boy grinned.

Guess it was Mr. Noble, sir. He's a real gent, he is; but full of his jokes. He seen me one day a-ridin' Ambition for his sweets, and told the guv'ner I'd be all right if I had a pair of boots, and then, when they got the boots, they was so big that Miss Fanny she laffed, and he laffed, and guv me the name of Billy Boots, and it stuck to me ever since."

"How old are you, Billy?"

"Seventeen, sir."

The colonel stared.

"Seventeen! Why you don't look over ten or twelve."

"Billy grinned again.

"Guess it's the smoke, sir. I smoked and chawed ever since I were a kid."

"Indeed? And you t'ink dat keep you small, Billee?"

"Guess so, boss. Well, what do you want with me? I've got to get home."

"To ask you questions, Billee. You tell de truth, I pay you well."

"Ask away, boss."

"How long have you been with Governor Bloodgood's stables?"

"Ever since I can remember, boss. Ye see, dad used to work up on the guv'ner's farm, and he got hurt so bad it laid him up two year afore he died. 'Twere one of the horses give him a kick in the ribs, and he tuck what the doctors called *presumption*—"

"Consumption, you mean, Billee."

"Yes, boss. And when the old man died, the guv'ner 'lowed he'd take keer of all us kids, and wanted to put me to school. But I hated books and loved horses, so he let me stay round the stable. I was wild to ride, but old Burton wouldn't trust me."

"Who's old Burton?"

"The trainer, boss. Ah he's a deep 'un."

"A deep one? How?"

The boy looked round timidly.

"Ye won't tell, boss, will ye?"

"Not a word, Billee."

"Well, boss, the guv'ner trusted that man, 'cause he cum with a c'rakter from some English lord and I ain't savin' but what he's a good enough trainer; but Lordy, boss, he jest pulls the wool over the guv'ner's eyes. He ain't won a race all summer, till to-day."

"Ah! you mean dat Burton sold him out?"

"That's jest it, boss, and they gittin' bad starts and pullin' the pore beasts, and gettin' pocketed and what not. I seen it all the time, and didn't know what to do. I didn't dare say nothin'. The guv'ner wouldn't ha' b'lieved a boy like me."

"And how did you come at last to ride in de race to-day?"

"All Mr. Frank, sir. You know he's sweet on Miss Fanny, and I made bold at last to ax him. God bless him, sir. He got me the chance I were a-waitin' fur, and Burton can't do me no more harm now."

"Dis Burton, who you t'ink it is dat he is leagued wid, my boy?"

"Eh, boss?"

"I say who is it bribes him?"

"Oh, you mean who's he in with? Well, boss, there's only one man I ever seen him with, and that's the one they call the Boss Better. Oh, he's a deep 'un, he is. What he don't know ain't worth knowin' and he's jest everlastin'ly a-skinnin' Mr. Frank."

"Billee," interrupted the colonel, "would you like to save Mr. Frank from dis man?"

"Save him, boss? How?"

"By telling de truth to Governor Bloodgood, if de time come I call on you?"

The boy looked doubtful.

"Guv'ner wouldn't b'lieve me against the trainer, boss, nohow."

"Not yet. But if you watch all you see and keep still de time will come. Ven I call to you to come up in dat day, vill you speak de truth?"

"You bet, boss. Only give me a chance, and if I don't tell all I know 'bout Burton, it's funny."

"Dat will do, Billee. Now can you write?"

"Yes, boss, but I ain't much on the spell."

"Never mind. You can write?"

"Yes, boss."

"Very well. I want you to write me a leetle letter, every week, Billee, to tell me if you see dat Crooke round de stable of de Governor."

"He don't never come, boss. He sends for the trainer and Burton goes."

"Aha! Where do they meet?"

"I dunno, boss; but I kin find. They're a-goin' somewhere to night."

"How do you know?"

"'Cause there's races the day arter to morrer," said the boy with a wink, "and we've got in Fanny Flyaway, fur the mile heats. I know suthin's up."

The colonel rose in some excitement.

"You are sure of dis, boy?"

"I know the filly's entered, boss, and I'm a-goin' to ride her. Miss Fanny said I should to-night."

"Then do you think you can win?"

"I kin try, boss, if the hoss ain't fixed on me."

"Billee," said the colonel, earnestly, "how much is your place worth?"

"Reckon a good deal now, boss, since folks is slatterin' five hundred dollar bills 'round."

"I give you anoder, if you keep dat horse from being injured before de race. My boy, tell me, can you shoot a pistol?"

"Yes, boss, but I ain't got none."

The colonel instantly pulled out from his breast-pocket a small plain pistol, with a large bore.

"I give you dis, Billee. Hide it, and den listen to what I say."

The boy clutched the weapon with all the eagerness of his age in possession of a real deadly weapon, and the colonel went on:

"You sleep by dat horse to-night, and before de race slip into de stable and stay dere by de horse. He know you?"

"It's a filly, boss. Know me? Guess she jest does that."

"Go and stay by her. Dey will put something in de feed at night. You see a man come dere in d dark; you vait till he come to de manger. Den you shoot. Do not shoot before. Wait till de pistol near touch him. Den you never miss. Dat is all, Billee."

Billy looked frightened.

"But I'll be hung, boss. It's murder."

"Ah, I forgot, Billee. I say shoot—I do not say where. Now I say touch de pistol to de man's leg, and shoot. I will see dat you come to no harm. I want to catch de villain—to mark him."

"Guess we'll do that, boss, anyhow. Any more to tell me, boss?"

"Yes, Billee. You must meet me to-morrow at de Fifth avenue gate of de Central Park."

"Go there every day, boss, when the hosses is in town. Ain't none now but Miss Fanny's pony. Guess it wants exercise."

"Yes, Billee. Be dere at seven in de morning. I haf my reason. You vill see."

Billy rose up and touched his cap.

"All right, boss; I'll be there."

Then he hesitated.

"I say, boss."

"Well, Billee?"

"Did you know Miss Fanny and Mr. Frank's out?"

The colonel started.

"Ah! how you know, Billee?"

Billy grinned.

"I seen her a-cryin' to-night and Mr. Noble didn't come to call."

"Ah! does he call all de time, Billee?"

"Pretty reg'lar, boss, 'cept on huggin' nights."

"On what?"

"Huggin' nights, boss—Sattdays I mean."

The colonel could not help a smile.

"And you call Saturday hugging night?"

"To be sartain, boss. That's when I go to see my gal, and so does all the others."

"And have you a girl alreadee?" asked the colonel, highly amused.

Billy drew himself up proudly.

"In course I has, boss. Ain't I old enough?"

"Certainlee, Billee. I do not mean to offer any offense. And dis girl, who is she, Billee? You love her?"

"Oh, boss, I'm jest gone on her. She's got eyes like—like—"

Billy cast about for a simile.

"Jest like the best hoss ever was foaled, boss—dark and soft and big—and she works on a sewin' machine and makes ten dollars a week, boss. Think of that. And we're a-goin' to be married jest as soon as ever I gits a reg'lar place as jockey, and—"

"Hush! hush!" interrupted the colonel, laughing. "Dat is enough, my boy. You are onlee seventeen, Billee. Do not t'ink of marry till you are twenty-one at de least."

"Why not, boss?"

Billy looked dignified and insulted.

"Because you are not old enough, Billee. You do not know if dis girl she love you trulee. How old is she, Billee?"

Billy looked a little confused.

"Well, boss, she's a little older'n I be. She says she's twenty-one; but she loves me ever so much, boss."

The colonel patted his shoulder.

"You are good boy, Billee; but you must promise me not to get married in haste. You vait till I tell you it is time, I give you some present on de vadding-day. Is dat bar-gain?"

Billy looked wise.

trance, nearly stumbling over him, with a curse.

"Get out of the way, you little imp! What are you doing up at this time of night?"

Billy shrunk to one side and ran away, expecting a blow from one he believed to be drunk; but the man went on, growling to himself in a way that showed he was either angry or drunk, and the boy looked after him long and earnestly.

"I do b'lieve," muttered Billy Boots, "it's old Crook, hisself. Wonder what he was a-doin' in there?"

The boy watched him to the end of the block and then set off to follow the Boss Better who kept on his way at a swift walk deviating slightly from a chalk line in a way that confirmed the boy in his suspicion that Crooke had been drinking too hard.

Three blocks he followed him and then Crooke went into another hotel where Billy saw him through the window, entering his name on the book and felt satisfied that he had gone to sleep for the night.

Then the boy turned away and went to his own home, which was in the servants' quarter of a large Fifth Avenue house into which he entered by a latch-key and took his way to the stable over which he slept.

But before he went to bed he paid a visit to the stable itself, where he was greeted with a welcoming whinny by a very pretty little bay horse who seemed to know him well and to whom he said affectionately:

"Charley, boy, are ye glad to see me? Ready fur a gallop to-moerow?"

Charley whinnied his delight at the idea and Billy was just going away when the stable bell rung and a voice from one of the rooms above called out:

"You down there. Is that Billy Boots?"

"Yes!" answered Billy, who knew the voice of the old coachman.

"Well, go to the speaking tube. Tell 'em I'm in bed. Drat these gentlefolks. They think a body's nothing to do but answer bells day and night."

The coachman was a grumbling old Englishman, who hated to be disturbed.

Billy went to the speaking tube.

"What is it, sir?"

It was a feminine voice that answered; one he knew well, that of his young mistress.

"Who's there?" she asked.

"Me, miss; Billy Boots."

"Oh yes. Well, Billy, I'm going to take an early canter to-morrow. Have Charley ready at six to go to the Park. Have you an extra horse?"

"Nothin' but Tom Tucker, miss."

"Well, be ready to go with me. That's all. Good-night, Billy."

"Good-night, miss."

Then as he went up to his room he muttered.

"She's a lady; she is. 'Good-night Billy.' Half of these rich gals wouldn't think of sayin' as much to a boy. But I wonder what's struck her all of a sudden to go a-ridin' afore breakfast. Knocks my little scheme to meet that furri' boss. He'll have to wait, I reckon. Well, I can't help it."

And he soon after forgot all about it in the land of dreams.

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE PARK.

THE Central Park, on a summer morning just after sunrise, before the crowd comes in, is one of those beautiful spots where an early riser can enjoy himself as well as if he were in the country, with all the conveniences of town in reach at the same time.

The flowers bloom as freshly and smell as sweet as any in the land, the birds are tamer than almost anywhere else, from not being molested; and besides all the beauties of nature, there are the beauties of art to attract beholders.

On the next morning after the memorable race in which the dark horse, Ambition, captured so many "knowing ones," the thin and erect form of Colonel Plunger—or more properly Plongeur—came strolling toward the Fifth Avenue gate of the Park, one of the first to come there on foot as the sun rose. The colonel nodded familiarly to the gray-coated keeper on duty and remarked:

"A fine morning, my friend, to see nature and human nature. Do you you smoke?"

And offered him a cigar, at which the other smiled affably, and put it in his pocket saying:

"Yes, sir, thank ye, sir, but not on dooty, sir."

The colonel smiled.

"Ah, I see, dat is de custom of de countree. I have lived long time in Spanish America, and dere every one smoke, police and all. I am stranger here. Is it permit to sit down on de bench so long as I wish?"

"Why, certainly, sir," returned the keeper, with a stare. "Them seats is free to all, 'cept they wants to sleep there all night."

"Ah, den dere are dose dat vant to sleep all night in such a place."

"Sartain, sir; tramps and such like."

"I see, I see. Pardon, my friend. You know I am stranger here."

"I should think you was," muttered the keeper, as the colonel sauntered away to a bench and sat down to smoke a cigar. "Sich a stranger I never seen afore."

The habitual bland smile on the lips of the colonel remained there, as he sat on the bench smoking, in such a position as to command the entrance to the Ride, and before long he saw several other early birds ride rapidly past him into this spot for a morning gallop, not so rare a luxury as some might think, among the bloods of New York City.

Most were old gentlemen, with white hair, accompanied by their daughters; and very few young men made their appearance, till the colonel suddenly gave a little start and pulled his hat over his brows, as a couple of a different character came dashing up from Fifth avenue at a rapid canter.

The man of this couple was tall and heavily built, the woman slender and as graceful as a fawn, while both rode unusually showy horses.

The lady had on a gorgeous riding habit, with gold lace on the breast of a velvet jacket, while the bay horse on which she rode was plunging and fretting for a runaway, in a state that would have put nine male riders out of ten to their best efforts to control it.

Nevertheless, this lady sat there as if she had been glued to the saddle, and kept punishing the animal with curb and whip together, as if she liked to make him caper.

Her companion had a quieter horse, and the colonel recognized in him Crooke, the Boss Better, with the unknown lady.

As they passed, he heard the lady cry out in French, with a ringing laugh:

"Ah, ca! this is not riding at all. This is a mere funeral procession. Come! *Houp la! laissez aller!*"

And she let go the curb and dashed by the park-keeper so close that the man started in alarm, when she and her escort vanished in the ride, going full speed.

Then the park-keeper came growling over to the colonel, saying:

"They think we have easy times here, sir, but I tell you these mornin' gallopers makes it mighty hard. I'll pull that lively gal up when she comes back. She's too darnation smart, a-trying to knock a man down when he's got a wife and children depending on him."

"Did you ever see her before?" asked the colonel, puffing a volume of smoke.

"Yes, I've seen and I know her, too. That's the woman they calls the Countess Saint Aure. I don't care if she's a queen, I'll pull her up for fast ridin', if she comes this way again to-day. See if I don't."

"I should advise you to do so," said the colonel, gravely. "De insolence of dese women is too bad. Ah, who is dat now?"

A young man on a handsome horse, as fine as silk, was coming up.

Rider and horse were alike fashionable. The animal had a bang tail and plaited mane, glossy hide, hoofs blacked and polished as carefully as the rider's boots; saddle and bridle of the palest buff, cleaned with oxalic acid; stirrups and bit gleaming like silver.

The rider had the latest style of bottle-green riding-coat, with trowsers lightly strapped, and a most uncompromising high hat, while he rode in the style of one who has learned at a riding academy in Fifth avenue, and is thinking of his lessons all the time.

Nevertheless, his handsome face and figure made him a very agreeable object to look at, though he came at a slow pace.

The colonel pulled his hat forward again, and said to the park-keeper hurriedly:

"Stand in front of me. I don't want that gentleman to see me. I know him."

The park-keeper did as requested, and the young man rode slowly on into the ride, when gray-coat observed:

"Then ye know a very nice gent, sir, is that Mr. Noble, and long life to him. He's got a heart for a poor man all the time, he has. Many the five-dollar note he's give me."

"What for?" asked the colonel, surprised.

The park-keeper winked.

"Not for nothing, you may bet. But that'd be tellins. Maybe I'll get one to-day, if he comes back the right way."

"Aha!" said the colonel, "you mean if he comes back not alone, eh?"

The park-keeper laughed.

"I see you've been there. Yes, of course there's a lady in the case. Shouldn't wonder if she happened along soon."

But minute after minute passed and at last the colonel took out his watch and observed:

"Half-past six. When do you go off, my good friend?"

"Seven o'clock, sir."

And the park-keeper looked uneasily down Fifth avenue, as if he was disappointed in not seeing some one there that he expected.

The colonel, too, kept glancing that way, and presently a smile crossed his face as he saw a lady on a bay pony come sedately out of a side street, followed by a very small groom, and trot slowly toward the gate.

The park-keeper's face, too, lighted up, and he said with an accent of satisfaction:

"I thought she wouldn't miss her mornin' gallop. That's what keeps the roses in the lady's cheeks; ain't I right, sir?"

"Certainlee," responded the colonel. "Do you know de ladie, my friend?"

"Yes, sir, that's Miss Bloodgood, the heiress. She's as reg'lar as clockwork gin'rally, but she's a quarter of an hour late to-day."

"Aha!" said the colonel, slyly. "Den it is Mr. Noble who was too earlee."

The keeper laughed.

"None of my biz, sir, but I guess it's a dollar bill in my pocket anyhow."

Then, as the young lady came up, he touched his cap respectfully, and she stopped her horse to say:

"Good-morning, Roberts. Are there many people in the ride yet?"

"Most all of the usual set, miss. I seen Mr. Noble go in, 'bout twenty minutes since. Didn't say nothing. Looked kinder thoughtful, miss."

The young lady colored slightly.

"Are you wife and children all well, Roberts? Remember, if they need anything I'll send Billy round at once with it."

"Thankee kindly miss. They're all well jest at present."

Then he drew back, and she rode on, with the diminutive *gron* in fifteen paces in the rear.

During the conversation with the keeper Billy Boots had kept behind, telegraphing signals to the colonel, who kept his hat over his face and pretended to see nothing, but as soon as the young lady went into the ride, the old soldier suddenly rose up and walked into the Park along the main road, as if, for all that he called himself a stranger, he knew the way pretty well.

He walked rapidly and occasionally took a cut across the grass, in reckless defiance of the sign-boards, where no keeper was within sight.

By this means he finally arrived at a bridge under which ran the ride, and was able to note most of the people who had galloped in, now walking their horses and dawdling back.

Pretty soon he heard the loud, clear tones of Madame St. Aure coming from another part of the ride, and as he came in sight was surprised to see that her companion was no longer Crooke, the Boss Better, but none other than Frank Noble, to whom she was talking in the gayest of strains, while the young man seemed silent and ill at ease.

"I am charm'd," he heard the Frenchwoman say, "to have made your acquaintance, Monsieur Noble. I must thank Monsieur Crooke for it. I come out wid him, I lose my cavalier—helas! I've vas-vat you say—*triste—melancholie*. You are *jeune homme de bon gout—aha!—mon gars—vat you say—you like de Coney Island—de p-tit souper—de champagne?* Ah, *vive la joie*. Ve vill haf—eh, *mon dieu—qu'as tu, mon ami?* Vat de mattaire?"

The colonel, looking down above, saw Frank Noble start violently as a young lady rode round a corner of the winding road, followed by a small groom, and met him face to face.

"Aha!" muttered the watcher, "so that is your little game, Mr. Sh. rply. Now we'll see fun."

The young lady, as she met the pair, looked Frank Noble full in the face with a cold stare, and never noticed him, while he on his part, mechanically lifted his hand to his hat and let it drop again as if afraid to incur rebuke.

Then the colonel saw the young lady's lip curl slightly as she looked at the Frenchwoman, at which madame shrugged her shoulders and burst out laughing, as she cried in French to Frank:

"How she looks at us! One would think she was jealous, on my faith!"

Then Fanny Bloodgood gave her horse a spiteful lash of the whip, darted under the arch and off, full gallop in the opposite direction, while the Frenchwoman turned in her saddle to look back, saying:

"My faith, after all, she has not such a bad seat, for an American. Come, my boy, I'm famished. Let us to breakfast. That horse of yours needs a gallop."

And with that she dealt his horse a stinging cut with her own whip and away they went, full speed toward the Fifth avenue entrance.

"Now we'll see if that keeper executes his threat of stopping her," muttered the colonel, turning away. "There is quite a nice little quarrel brewing to-day between these two lovers. I must find out how it happened. Sharply has set the woman on the boy—but where has he gone to? As for Miss Fanny, she'll go out by the other gate, or I know nothing of women."

So saying, he turned away and walked back to the gate at which he had entered, where he found the park-keeper replaced by the next relief and the usual stream of early vehicles beginning to come in.

At the other side of the street were some hacks, and into one of these he jumped and told the driver to take him in the direction of the other end of the Ride, where it came out in Eighth avenue.

When he reached there the hack was halted, and he watched the few riders coming out to go home by the Boulevard, till he saw the black riding habit for which he was looking. Miss Fanny cantered out much more rapidly than she had entered, and the colonel said:

"Drive after that lady and keep near her."

Jehu winked and obeyed, so that very soon after his horses' heads were abreast of Billy Boots, who turned round with:

"Where are you a-goin' to, stoopid? Don't ye know nothin'?"

Then catching sight of the colonel's face the boy dropped back to the wheel and the other said rapidly:

"At nine, Billee, at de Hotel Brunswick. I will be dere."

Billy nodded and grinned.

"All right, boss. I'll be there too."

Then he dashed on after his young lady, who inquired rather severely:

"What were you doing, Billy, with the person in that carriage?"

"I was a-tellin' him, miss, he'd better be keefer, a-tryin' to run over me," said Billy, with dignity.

She smiled faintly.

"Why, you little fellow, did you think you could terrify him?"

"Guess he'll haul in his h'ns, miss," was the serene answer. "He's a-dr'ppin off now. See if he ain't."

The young lady glanced back over her shoulder and saw the hack draw into the line of vehicles, so she said no more but rode home in silence, her face showing plainly that she was in decided ill-temper.

She had, in fact, ridden out to the Park on purpose to meet Frank, and meeting him in the ride accompanied by such a "loud" companion had shocked her sense of delicacy extremely, so that the quarrel initiated by her father the day before on the Grand Stand was already widened and deepened to a gulf of formidable size.

Billy Boots, astute and observant, saw the whole scene and cogitated over it as he followed his young mistress, but said not a word to any one about it.

Meantime the colonel drove off down town a few blocks, where he paid and dismissed his hack and then proceeded to his lodgings, where he took breakfast, after which he strolled off to the Hotel Brunswick, where he took a seat in the lobby, calmly observant of everything.

He ascertained from inquiry at the office that Frank Noble had not yet returned from his ride in the Park, and the clock struck nine with no signs yet of the young man.

Then the colonel saw the form of little Billy Boots approaching him, and the boy took his seat beside him, saying:

"Here I am, boss. What is it?"

"Don't appear to notice me, Billy," said the colonel, in a low voice, staring at the opposite wall. "I am going into the square. Follow me and wait till I take a seat. Then come up and sit beside me."

Billy nodded and the colonel went slowly out.

CHAPTER VII.

THE COUNTESS.

At the door of another hotel not very far away a lady and gentleman were dismounting at the time the colonel went out into the Madison Square park.

The lady's horse, a full thoroughbred, was all covered with foam, as if it had been ridden hard, and the gentleman's steed was also reeking, while the rider looked flurried and disordered, as if now used to such rapid work. The lady, however, who wore a very showy riding habit, was as cool as a cucumber, and jumped off her horse alone before her companion could dismount to help her, crying:

"Ah, maladroit! You are too slow. I must give you two, t'ree lesson. Come, I am famish. Let us to breakfast. Hola! vere is dat Alphonse?"

A dark-looking man came running up, and she threw him her horse's bridle, saying:

"Take him to the stable, Alphonse, and the horse of monsieur also. Allons."

Then she slipped her arm through that of Frank Noble, without giving him time to expostulate, and hurried him into the hotel, talking all the way in a mixture of French and English, with a profusion of nods and shrugs and gestures, all very graceful and all suiting well her dark and brilliant beauty.

As for Frank, he looked a little bewildered, but a good deal fascinated. He had met this strange creature that morning, had been introduced to her by Crooke as "Madame the Countess of St. Aure," and had been asked to take her back to the hotel on account of Crooke being called off by a business engagement.

The countess had at once taken possession of him in a way that he could not resist, and since the meeting with Fanny Bloodgood in the ride the young man had become almost reckless and entirely desperate of ever regaining the good graces of his lady-love. Therefore, he gave himself up to his new acquaintance with the more freedom that he had never seen such a woman before.

Not only was she beautiful, but there was a dash about her such as fairly dazed him. He did not know what to make of it, and attributed it in his innocence to foreign manners; for he had so recently inherited his wealth and had lived in so simple a way before that he had actually never been to Europe.

Madame St. Aure, for all that she was very small and slender, looked tall and seemed to be uncommonly strong and wiry, from the way in which she fairly forced him up-stairs.

She led him into a large and finely-furnished suite of apartments, where there were two or three people chatting together in French, and these she scattered with a hasty exclamation in her own tongue which he did not understand, and which sounded to him more like Spanish.

They scuttled away, all but a neat French maid, to whom she said:

"Go order breakfast for two, Francoise. This gentleman will remain for the present."

Then Francoise vanished and the countess continued familiarly to Frank:

"Come, mon gars, what you think of me in my own home?"

"I think you're charming anywhere," was the young man's answer, at which she only laughed and shrugged her shoulders, crying:

"Tiens, you don't know how to compliment like my countrymen. You could draw up on your feet—*comme ça*—and say wid a low bow, Madame is charming in all place but in none so charming as dis."

Frank smiled and did as she ordered, when she gave him a playful cut with her whip.

"Ah, dat is bettaire, but you cannot bow in de way of gentilhomme. Come, I s'all gif you lesson all day. Monsieur Crooke he tell me you *jeune homme tres riche*. You must be educate to spend de money in de grand mannaire, like de duke of *ma belle France*. Ah *ça!* I s'all make you *un homme distingué* in t'ree mont, you let me."

"I'm sure I shall be very grateful," said Frank, a little doubtfully, and not quite knowing how to take this strange countess, who had such wonderfully free manners.

"Bon," she answered, slapping him again on the shoulder, "then you shall come out wid me every morning after dis. It is first of all *absolument nécessaire* dat you ride bettaire. Eh, mon dieu, you vas afraid of de horse."

Frank colored up angrily, retorting.

"I learned to ride in the academy, and the master called me one of his most promising pupils, madame."

She laughed merrily.

"Eh, mon dieu, de academie! Vat vas dat? Vat academie?"

"Why, the riding academy, of course."

"Mon pauvre gars; you cannot ride at all, I tell you. Come, I will teach you. Ve will ride togeder. I tell you I have ride wid de Imperatrice of Autriche, to de hound in Europe, and I say you know not'ing. But you s'all learn, you s'all learn, mon gars. Aha! *voila déjeuner*—de breakfast. Now ve s'all have good appetite. Come."

And he found himself sitting down to breakfast with this singular person, whom he had never met before, talking away to her as if they were old friends, the conversation rapidly taking a tenderer turn under the influence of champagne, for this particularly fast countess had wine for breakfast, and a regular feast spread, and took to cigarettes afterward as naturally as any Spaniard.

How it happened he hardly knew, but the morning went past like a dream, and the clock on the mantlepiece struck twelve, when he found himself sitting by the countess on the sofa, while she was arranging a flower in his buttonhole, and she laughed gayly at his look of surprise and dismay, as he noted the lapse of time.

"I really beg your pardon, countess, I'd no idea it was so late," he stammered, and then she cried:

"Ah, dat vill not do. *Tiens! comme vous eset gauche!* You sould nevare blush. It is like de shild, de babee. You sould rise and bow, and say *Madame la comtesse* I have great regret to take my leave. I sould like to stay forevaire. You see?"

He obeyed her as well as he knew how, and was rewarded by more raillery and a little slap on the side of the face, after which he managed to bow himself out, and went away, hardly knowing what had happened to him all that morning.

As for madame, no sooner had the door closed on him than her face took on a very different expression and she threw herself on a couch and actually began to cry a little. It was in tears that Crooke found her when he came in, soon after, saying as he entered, in French:

"I thought he'd never go. Well, I needn't ask what you've done, or he wouldn't have staid so long. In a word, you've made him safe."

She looked up at him in a singular way with a certain fine scorn in her eye.

"Yes, he is safe, my husband!"

Crooke started guiltily.

"Hush!" he said, "you fool, don't you know that walls have ears! I am your business

agent, not your husband. Do any of the others know it?"

She yawned and stretched slightly.

"I know not. It makes little difference. In France, as you are aware my dear, they care little for it. You can play the polite and accommodating husband as well as any one."

Something in her tone seemed to anger him, for he scowled and muttered:

"You always were, a fool with your romance. Didn't I make a queen of you, from a mere farmer's girl, riding horses to water?"

"Yes, truly, and a queen of what? I owe you much, Philippe."

And her dark eyes blazed with the scorn she cared not to conceal.

"Well?" he asked impatiently, "what have you done with him? Have you asked him to dine?"

"No."

"Indeed?"

"No. There is plenty of time, if I conclude to go on and pluck this bird. At present, by my faith, Philippe, I am doubtful."

"And why?" he asked scowling.

"Because I have had a new experience to-day."

"A new experience? You?"

There was a tone of coarse scorn in his voice that flushed her face with some undefinable feeling, but her tone was cold and hard as she answered:

"Yes, it is strange, is it not? I had, as you thought, about exhausted all experience to which a woman can come in Paris. But absolutely I have had a new one to-day."

"And what is it, Coralie?"

"It is that I have met a gentleman at last, one who treats me as if I were a lady, and respects me, no matter what I do to him. What think you of that, my friend? And what would he think of me if he knew all about me?"

Crooke laughed coarsely.

"He'd think a good many hard things, no doubt. But what's that to me? You know what I told you. You can't keep up this style of living without money, and I won't try to support it."

"I have not asked you," she retorted. "I earn my own living, monsieur, and thank no one. My bills here are all paid."

"I know that, but you know well enough that if this young man knew how you earn your living, he would drop you like a hot iron. Therefore it is necessary to keep the secret from him, if we are to pull his feathers, and I promise you, if we do not, some one else will."

"What do you wish me to do, my dear?" she asked looking at him searchingly.

"To fascinate him; draw him in so that he cannot go back and get him to play cards with us. That's all."

"Well, be easy then. I've already made an appointment to ride with him every day till further notice."

Crooke's face brightened perceptibly.

"Aha! That is good."

"Good. Yes, for you no doubt. It is your gain, whichever way the cards turn."

"And yours too, Coralie. Do we not share everything together?"

She burst into a shrill scornful laugh.

"Share! Yes. I admit that whenever I am in prosperity you are ready to claim your rights to a share, but what share have I in your good times? Never mind, monsieur. This time I will do as you wish because it happens to be in my own line of wishes. In passing did you know this youth was in love with an American lady?"

He scowled deeply.

"Yes. I know it, and he can't have her. I'll take care of that."

"Why not, my dear?"

"Because if he marries, we shall lose all hold on him. But he will not marry this one at least. They have quarreled."

"Quarreled. I should say so. Why, my friend, did you know we met the lady as we rode back to day?"

"Indeed? Truly?"

"Yes; and any one could see she was as jealous as a tigress. Ah! these young girls cannot hide their thoughts like us old ones. Nevertheless, my friend, it set me thinking, this meeting."

"G'r what?"

"Never mind. You will find out some day. In the meantime, it grows near the hour for rehearsal. Had it not been for that I might not have let my captive go all day."

CHAPTER VIII.

TO THE COLONEL'S VISIT.

WHEN Frank Noble came home to his rooms that day he found on his table the card of "Colonel Plunger," and was informed that the gentleman had called twice and would return at three.

Frank noticed that the card was new, and that the colonel had Anglicized his name in the interval from "Plongeur" to "Plunger," a free translation.

The young favorite of fortune sat down to muse over his morning's adventures in rather a reckless frame of mind. He felt that he had

not been fairly treated by Governor Bloodgood, the day before, and that Miss Fanny, in cutting him dead on the ride, that morning, had been too severe on him for something he could not help.

"I couldn't help being introduced to the Countess," he said to himself, as he puffed angrily at his cigar, alone in his rooms. "It's not my fault if she's a handsome woman, and takes a fancy to me. To be sure, she's rather loud for our tastes; but that may be French ways, and I don't see why the mere fact of my riding beside her should entitle Miss Fanny to treat me with rudeness."

He was interrupted in his reflections by the arrival of Colonel Plunger, who entered his room, speaking:

"My dear boy, I am glad I find you. I have something to say to you."

Frank looked surprised.

"Sit down, colonel, and take a cigar. You say you have something to say to me? Not business, is it?"

"Yes, it is business of de great import, my friend. It is business dat concern de friend of yours, and I must ask you to listen and grant my favor."

"Certainly, colonel, anything you like."

"I wish you to introduce me to friend of yours, my boy. I want lettaire to him."

"To whom, colonel?"

"To Monsieur Bloodgood."

Frank writhed uneasily.

"Well, I swear—if you had said that yesterday morning, I should have said yes with pleasure, but to day—do you know, colonel, I'm in trouble with that very gentleman."

The colonel watched him keenly, even while he affected to be surprised.

"Indeed, my dear boy, I did not know it. In trouble. Vat is it? Any thing dat I can help you in?"

"I fear not, colonel."

"Excuse a—pardon—but—you know, my boy, I am old friend of your fader. I might be excuse for ask—what is de trouble you speak of?"

Frank was silent for a while, and at last said in a low tone:

"I don't know that I'd mention it to another soul, colonel; but somehow I can't help trusting you. You seem to be more like a relation to me than a mere acquaintance. You're the only man who has ever told me the truth since I became rich, and I don't forget the way you backed me up against that bully Riley, yesterday."

The colonel shrugged his shoulders.

"Dat! I did noting. Only—had he tried to strike, I might have done somet'ing. Yes, my boy, t'ink of me as friend dat woud fight for you. Vat vas de trouble vid de Bloodgood familee?"

"Well, you see, colonel, I'm—I'm—well, I'm in love with—"

"Dat Miss Fannee? You are right, my boy. Dat is young ladie of de old kind, dat is good, pure, noble. You do vell to love ladie. Noblesse oblige. Yes, and you haf trouble?"

"Yes. It all began yesterday. You see I went with their party on the Grand Stand, and I had made a sort of a promise—"

The colonel stopped him sharply.

"Vat is dat? A sort of a promise? Dat is vat gentleman do not make, my boy. He promise or deny—vich?"

Frank colored deeply.

"Well, it was neither. I fear I am too weak sometimes. I know that gambling is bad for me, drinking worse, yet I find it al most impossible to resist when friends press me one way or the other. And so it happened that Miss Fanny had just got me to promise—yes, I own, it was a positive promise—not to bet any more on horse races, when, just at that moment, that fellow Crooke came up, and blurted out the fact that he had lost a heavy bet to me on the very race which we had just been witnessing, which Governor Bloodgood's horse had won."

The colonel listened intently.

"And dat made de trouble?"

"Yes. The Governor's a peculiar man, of all sorts of prejudices, and he got up at once and took Fanny away."

"But you had no open quarrel?"

"Nothing but that. But if you had seen the old gentleman's face, you'd have known he was very angry."

"Well, my boy," said the colonel, quietly. "If you do not decline to give it to me, I shall still request dat lettaire to de Governor, to introduce me as old friend of your fader, come to see dis countree for a visit. Will you write it?"

Frank hesitated and fidgeted worse than before, threw his cigar out of the window, took up another, bit off the end three or four times, got up and paced the room, the colonel still watching him with a faint smile on his face, and finally said:

"Of course, if you wish it; but I'll do you no good. In fact, I may as well put it plainly, he may refuse to see you."

The colonel waved his hand.

"I take de risk of dat, mon ami. I haf particular reason I want to see Monsieur Bloodgood. All dat you haf say do not gif reason for him to insult you, and he will not insult me, I t'ink."

"But that's not all," said Frank, almost in a whisper.

The colonel smiled again.

"I thought not. Vell, vat else?"

"Well, you see, this morning I went out for an early ride in the Park; and, to tell you the truth, I've been in 'e habit of meeting Miss Fanny there in the Ride, almost every day, for a little conversational canter."

"Yes, I know, my boy. Go on."

"And this morning I went there in the hope that I might meet her again and explain yesterday's misunderstanding. But, as ill luck would have it, I met that fellow Crooke, with a French lady, and he introduced me and got me to ride home with the lady, as he had another engagement—"

"Aha! dat vas very curious, mon ami. Do gentlemen in dis citee abandon ladies to strangers on other engagements?"

Frank started, as if he saw the point for the first time.

"Well, it was funny; though I own I was so confused at the time I thought nothing about it."

"Confused? Why?" asked the colonel, keenly.

"Well, I ought to say she was a remarkably handsome woman and a beautiful rider. In fact, I never saw such a rider in all my life."

"Indeed, sare! And what was de name of dis lovely being dat ride so vell?"

"Madame la Comtesse de St. Aure," said Frank, rather proudly. "You may know her, perhaps, colonel, on the other side. She told me she had frequently hunted with the Empress of Austria."

The colonel puffed out a volume of smoke.

"Aha! And dis ladie ride very well? She have deserve de name Centaure."

Frank started.

"St. Aure, not Centaur. Ah, I see! Do you mean that it is not a true name?"

"I say not'ing, my boy. I wait. Dis ladie, dis Madame St. Aure, what of her?"

"Well, she was very fascinating; a fluent talker; and kept me so busy that I forgot all about any one else till I met Miss Bloodgood, face to face, in the Ride!"

"Aha! And then—?"

"Well, to tell the truth, I was about to bow as usual, when, by Jove! she cut me dead. Stared at me as if she did not know me."

The colonel made no comment, but continued his queries:

"And madame, what said she?"

"Well, to tell the truth, she said something I thought rather rude in French, but I was so much mortified at Miss Fanny's conduct that I thought nothing of it."

"What said she, my friend?"

"Something about the lady being jealous, and then she struck my horse with the whip, and we raced-off to the gate, nearly running over the keeper; and by Jove! sir, she rode at the same break-neck speed all the way home to her hotel, laughing at the mounted police for trying to catch us."

"Quite a lively ladie," observed the colonel, in the driest of tones. "You are to be congratulate on your new acquaintance among de noble of de old world, my boy. De countess, she say she have hund vid de Empress of Autriche. Did she say ven?"

"No, I didn't ask."

The colonel laughed.

"My boy, you let me gif you leetle piece advice?"

"Certainly, colonel."

"You leave dis Madame St. Aure alone, and steeck to Miss Fannee."

"I can't, colonel."

"Indeed. Why not?"

"Well, I've made a half-promise to go riding with her in the Park every morning till I learn to ride better."

"Indeed!"

The colonel's tone was so full of meaning that Frank flushed deeply.

"Yes. Is there any harm in it?"

"Vy in de morning? Vy not at four in de afternoon, ven de crowd is dere?"

Frank flushed still deeper.

"Because—well I don't know—we might attract comment."

"Indeed! And de people would see you. You are vise, my boy. But people vill see you in de morning. You say Miss Fannee she ride dere."

"I don't care what she sees," retorted Frank, rather sullenly. "I can be as independent as she can."

The colonel made a grimace.

"Ah, a regular lover's quarrel, I see. Dey are so bittaire. Vell, my boy, I tell you vot I do. Vere you keep your horse to ride?"

Frank named a stable.

"Vell, vat you say, I go ride vid you in de morning! I haf curiosites to see dis Madame St. Aure. Perhaps I know her in Paris."

"I'm sure I should be happy to make you acquainted with her," replied Frank, rather constrainedly.

The colonel nodded.

"Ver' well. It is bargain. Vat time you ride from here?"

"Six o'clock."

Again the answer was awkward and constrained.

"I vill meet you on the Fift' avenue as you go up; and now my boy, you write me dat lettaire to de Governor."

"What, after his daughter cut me?"

"My dear boy. I do not vant see Miss Fannee. I vant se monsieur. You s'all say only few words. You take de liberty to introduce Monsieur le Colonel Plongeur old friend of your fader, to see monsieur on business, dat is all."

"Oh, yes; that I can do cheerfully."

And Frank sat down and wrote off the note to the Governor, which note the colonel took and perused with a smile, saying:

"Dat is diplomatique. You are right not to indorse me any more. Vell, I vill go call on monsieur at once. You go to de race to morrow?"

"I don't know," said Frank, a little sullenly.

"I don't care for races any more after yesterday."

"Tut, tut! Dat vill all come right. You s'all see monsieur welcome you, ven he see you to-morrow."

"I don't want him to welcome me. I'm not a child to be taken up or dropped as suits his convenience or hers either. I'll show them both that I'm not."

The colonel laughed.

"Ah, dese young men, how dey jump to de conclusion. Mon ami, you vill fly to de feet of Miss Fannee ven she gif de signal."

"Will I?"

"Yes, you vill, and you will be right, mon ami. Von Miss Fannee is vort ten, twelf, twentee Madame St. Aure, as you vill find. I see you to-morrow. Apropos, you go see madame to-night?"

"Not yet. I could hardly—"

"Vell, you take my advice. Go to de hotel. Ask for her. Ask about her. Find out vat dey know about her. You vill not be sorry. I say not'ing. Good by."

CHAPTER IX.

GOVERNOR BLOODGOOD.

GOVERNOR BLOODGOOD was a venerable but well-preserved old gentleman, who had a large fortune which he had inherited in land, by which he had grown rich in the course of years without labor of his own. When he was a baby his father had bought a farm, to which he clung without selling an acre, living frugally, never spending a cent without necessity, and earning the reputation of a skinflint.

When he died, his only son, Erastus, was a young lawyer, and he managed to marry a lady whose farm adjoined his own, both being in the outskirts of the great city, and fast being encroached upon by squatters' shanties.

The consequence was that the young couple lived to see the whole farm covered with buildings and themselves millionaires by the time they attained middle age, while the lawyer had no trouble in being elected successively judge, comptroller, and Governor of the State, through the merit of holding his tongue and looking respectable, while he lived on his rents.

Now, at the age of sixty-seven, with an only daughter to inherit his wealth, the old gentleman had a satisfying sense that there was only one Governor Bloodgood in Gotham, and that he was the head of all sorts of society.

The Governor had one of the finest houses in the city, and a library which he had avowed his intention of leaving to the public at his death, as the finest ever collected, in his opinion.

In the midst of this library he was seated, dictating to a very bumble-looking secretary, whose seedy clothes showed that the Governor was by no means liberal in his wages, when a solemn servant bore in on a silver salver a card and a letter of introduction.

The Governor took up the card first and read it, half aloud, muttering:

"Colonel Plunger? Plunger? I don't know any such man. Some beggar, probably. I won't see him."

Then it occurred to him that the letter might explain something, so he read it:

"MY DEAR GOVERNOR:

"If you are not too angry with me for backing your horse in the races and winning sixty thousand dollars on him, permit me to introduce to your notice an old friend of my father, Colonel Plongeur, of the French army, who wishes to speak to you on business."

"Very sincerely yours,

"FRANK NOBLE."

The Governor allowed a smile to cross his usually stern features, where the selfish habits of the millionaire, afraid of all the world, had stamped their mark long ago.

"Won sixty thousand dollars, did he, the young scamp," he muttered. "Well, that's different. I thought he was losing all his money, and I can't countenance any connection with spendthrifts. But winning—that's different. I must look into this."

Then he said to patient John, who stood waiting like a statue:

"Send the gentleman up. Harris, you can

go for the present. When I want you I'll ring."

The humble clerk brightened up and took his departure. It was by no means pleasant duty to write to the dictation of the arbitrary old man.

Then the Governor wheeled round in his chair, and awaited the entrance of the stranger, looking as imposing as only a millionaire, proud of his wealth, can look.

And then into the room walked the colonel, erect and slender, attired in the height of fashion. His solemn black had been replaced by habiliments irreproachable in cut and color, and it was in accents nearly guiltless of French intonation that he said to the Governor:

"I am charmed to meet the author of 'Bloodgood's Numismatology,' for I understand you are the gentleman to whom the world owes so much."

The Governor actually smiled.

He had a hobby, like most millionaires; and that hobby was ancient coins. He had already a fine collection, and was still an enthusiastic hunter after coins and medals.

The one mortification of his life was that, as a numismatist, he had incurred a great deal of ridicule in Europe, where the old antiquarians cared nothing for his wealth, and his unfortunate book had been cut up dreadfully by a certain Doctor Zittendorfius, of Berlin.

But here was a stranger from France who actually spoke of his treatise with a tone of unfeigned respect.

"I was ill-advised enough to write that book," he said, with some abatement of dignity; "but I can hardly say that my ideas were adopted to any great extent."

The colonel affected great surprise.

"Not adopted? My dear sir, have you not seen the record of the proceedings of the French Academy last year, in January?"

"No; what were they?" asked the old man, eagerly. "I missed them."

"Well," exclaimed the colonel, "I have heard of hiding lights under bushels, but I must really say that this is astonishing. You know Zittendorfius, of course?"

The Governor frowned.

"By reputation, yes. Not personally."

"My dear sir, you do not need to know him personally. No one does. He is a miserable charlatan. Did you not see what the Academy said of him?"

"No, no. What was it?"

The Governor had forgotten all his dignity now in his anxiety as an author.

"My dear sir," said the colonel, impressively, "it was terrible, the way they came down on that unfortunate German for his views on numismatology, on that point on which you are so lucid and convincing. I mean on the evidences from coins that Julius Caesar had red hair."

"Yes?" cried the Governor, eagerly. "And they decided that—"

"That Zittendorfius was *wrong*. You know he insisted that the expression 'Rufus' on the coin discovered in Kent had no reference to Caesar, but to the Roman Governor, and that Caesar had black hair, beyond a doubt."

"Yes, yes, I know, and he entirely overlooked the essential fact that the coin bore on the obverse the letters 'J. C.' and—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the colonel, without any ceremony, "and the Academy seized hold of that fact, just as you do in your book, and triumphantly vindicated you, while they overwhelmed Zittendorfius with contempt as a charlatan."

The Governor actually rose up and grasped the stranger's hand, asking:

"My dear sir, where can I get this report? I would cheerfully pay almost any sum for it, if I were assured it was authentic."

"You shall have it, Governor, you shall have it. I am astonished that you have not seen it long ago. To be sure those things are not published, and the Academy affect a great deal of mystery, keeping their decisions in manuscript. But, luckily, I was present by invitation at that very meeting, and took a copy of the proceedings myself. You shall have it to-morrow —no—I have but one copy, I will get it duplicated for you."

"My dear sir," said the Governor, wringing his hand, "I cannot think of allowing you so much trouble. If you will trust me with your copy I will have it at once transcribed by my clerk."

"As you please," returned the colonel, in a tone of indifference. "I will hunt it up to-morrow and send it to you. There is a resolution of the Academy and a private letter to myself from my old friend General St. Estephe, whom you of course know as the great Roman antiquarian. He is very much stronger in his letter than the resolution, which is, of course, guarded in its language."

"Of course, of course, official reticence required that. And you have come to this country on business, colonel?"

"No, my dear sir, pleasure solely. I have worked hard most of my life, and now that I am rich enough to have my own way I determine to enjoy myself. I come to see you, as I

say, on business partly. I take interest in ancient coins and have a great desire to see your collection. In fact, I am instructed by the Antiquarian Society of Rouen to make a report on it."

The Governor tried to look modest.

"I'm afraid my poor little collection is not worthy the inspection of a distinguished antiquarian like yourself, colonel, but I shall be very happy to show it to you, I'm sure."

And it was with the gratified vanity of an old hobby rider that the Governor did so, the colonel professing unbounded, but critical, admiration of the store, suggesting different arrangements, and quite winning the Governor's heart, as he from the first had intended to do.

It was while they were in this pleasant frame of mind that the colonel observed, in the most carefree way imaginable:

"Ah, by the by, Governor, besides being an amateur antiquarian, I may as well say that I am much interested in the improvement of the breed of horses in France for cavalry purposes. I am informed that you have been quite successful as a breeder of racing stock."

The Governor beamed all over. If he was enthusiastic on coins, he was equally so on horses, and he at once began to dilate on his favorite theory of regenerating the racing blood of America by importations of pure Arabian stallions.

The colonel listened attentively, interjecting remarks, and the Governor finally observed with a modest chuckle:

"By the by, one of my horses took first prize in a race yesterday, and I have a promising filly in the mile heats at the Squantum Bay course to-morrow. Do you take any interest in racing, colonel?"

"Ah, my dear sir, who does not? I adore the races—when my favorite wins. I must really go and see that race. I suppose you have everything fair in this country?"

"Fair, colonel?"

"Yes; I mean you have none of the tricks that disgrace racing in England and France?"

"I hope not, I'm sure, colonel. For my own part, I admit that I do not know much of them. I enter my horses and let them run. I have not, it is true, been very fortunate in winning, but—"

The old gentleman hesitated, and the colonel observed, dryly:

"I understand, sir. You have not won very many races. That is the fault of your trainer, if the stock be good. I am rather an experienced person in these matters. Let me ask, do you keep a guard over your horses at night?"

"Certainly."

"And who is the guard?"

"The private watchman of course."

"Aha! well, my dear sir, let me tell you there is no guard so good as the boy who loves the horse. Who is to ride your filly to-morrow?"

The Governor hesitated again.

"To tell you the truth, I am in doubt. My trainer, Burton, wishes me to trust him to a professional jockey—"

"Have you won races with this jockey?" interrupted the colonel, keenly.

"Well, no; but he has been very lucky with other men's horses."

"Indeed! But loses with yours?"

"Well, yes."

"I thought so. My dear sir, have you not a boy in the stable who knows the mare, and is light enough to ride? Believe me, I have found such boys successful, because they love the horse and only think of winning the race."

The Governor looked surprised.

"Well now, do you know, I hardly dared to set up my opinion against that of an old and experienced trainer like Burton, but it is, nevertheless, a fact that I won the race yesterday by taking one of my boys in just that way, after losing steadily a whole season."

"Indeed? Then I should try it again."

"My daughter wishes me to do so, but I am really afraid of offending my trainer. He is a peculiar, cross-grained man, proud of his experience, and might throw up his place in a pet."

The colonel laughed.

"Is that the sort of man he is? Take my advice, monsieur. If he offers to resign take him at his word. There are plenty of trainers to be found. Make the boy ride the filly to-morrow and send him to the stables to-day with orders to let no one touch the horse but himself. I tell you, sir, in Europe no owner trusts his trainer unless he wins two out of three races all the time."

"Indeed?"

The Governor opened his eyes.

"Yes, my dear sir. I have seen many races, and I know that trainers and jockeys are very slippery people. Try my plan, and I answer for it, you win the mile heats."

"I will do it, colonel. What you are not going already? You must come and dine with me soon. Come, name a day. I want to have a good talk with you on the subject of Caesar's hair."

"With pleasure, monsieur, but not to-day. Come, I will take you at your word, monsieur."

What say you to this for an arrangement? You win the race to-morrow, I shall take pleasure in dining with you to drink the health of the winner."

The Governor shook hands warmly.

"My dear colonel, it is a bargain, except for one thing. Win or lose, I expect you at six."

"I will come, dear sir. Good-morning."

And the colonel left the millionaire's house humming softly to himself a French air, while the Governor sent at once for his clerk and dictated orders in accordance with the advice he had just received.

Colonel Plunger went off down the street to Madison Square, where he came on Billy Boots seated on a bench evidently waiting for him.

As he passed the boy he said quietly:

"Billee, go home quick. You will be wanted to ride Fannee Flyaway, and to stay in her box all night. Be sure dat you let no one in."

Billy rose up instantly.

"All right, boss," he said. "The man that tries it will get marked."

CHAPTER X.

IN THE STABLES.

MR. JOHN BURTON, Governor Bloodgood's trainer, was sitting at the door of the stables in a brown study, fingering a telegram that he had just received, which said:

"Charles Wandle will ride Fanny Flyaway to-morrow, and I wish him to stay in the mare's box all night, as guard, besides the watchman I send with him."

"Now what the dickens does that mean?" growled Burton to himself. "Is the old cove gettin' fly at last, or 'as some one been a-puttin' notions under 'is 'at as don't come there by nature? I ain't so green as not to understand a 'int. If that filly wins the 'eats ag'in my had-vice it's hodd. Now I'd like to know if that bloomin' young snob, Noble, 'as been a-puttin' this 'ere notion into the old gent's 'ead. If 'e 'as, all I can say is, it's dratted pore business for a rich cove like 'im to hiftere with a honest man makin' a livin' for his family."

As he soliloquized, he saw a gentleman coming slowly toward the stable, at sight of whom he jumped up and went forward to greet the new-comer, saying:

"Mr. Crooke, glad you're 'ere. Jest take a look at that, please."

He handed Crooke the telegram and they walked away from the stables toward a neighboring bar-room, Crooke reading.

When he had finished, the Boss Better said, in a low tone:

"There's something behind this, Burton. Some one's put a flea in the Governor's ear. How is the filly?"

"Well enough. Between me and you, Mr. Crooke, she never was fitter."

"Hum! Do you think she can take the first heat?"

"If you want her to, sir."

"I don't. No, I don't mind if she takes one heat. But she mustn't take the race at any price. I know who'll back her heavily, and I want to get square on him for Ambition. Burton, we've got to work quick. Who's in the stable now?"

"The boys, sir, and the helpers."

"Now's your time to fix her, then. Go in and put something in the manger."

The trainer turned pale.

"I daren't do it, not even to oblige you. The boys would see me and it couldn't be kept quiet. It's got to be done at night, unless you go in to see her yourself as a visitor."

Crooke looked at him doubtfully.

"Could you take me in as a stranger? Do any of the boys know me?"

"I'm afraid they do. Nigger Jim does, and he's round the box all the time."

"Hum! Could you get him out?"

Burton shook his head.

"Not unless I ordered him off, and I daren't do that. He's just the boy to complain to the Governor and bring it all out. No, if it's to be done at all, it's got to be done at night."

Crooke turned to him, locked round in an apprehensive way, and then fumbled in his pocket for a small bottle, which he handed the trainer:

"Do it yourself at night, and I give you a quarter of my winnings. I tell you it's worth fifty thousand dollars to me to have that mare lose."

The trainer looked at the bottle and shook it up suspiciously, asking:

"What's in it? Anything to kill her? Because I can't do that, you know."

"No, no, of course not. Only something to make her a little sleepy. It doesn't give any smell, it tastes sweet, because it's full of sugar; and if you mix it up in her feed she'll gobble it up without trouble. Surely you can smuggle it in at feeding time."

Burton shook his head.

"Can't be done. You know I made my rules strict on purpose that no one should say the Governor lost through 'orses not being fit. No, no, we've got to stick to the old safe way. Fix the jockey."

"Who is this Charles Wandle mentioned in the telegram?"

Burton scowled.

"A little beast from the Governor's place in Mohawk Valley. I 'ate him. He won on Ambition yesterday, and there'll be no 'olding him now."

"Why not fix the boy? He likes money as well as any one, don't he?"

"Twouldn't do. He might peach. I wouldn't dare approach him."

"I would. Is he here now?"

"No, sir. 'E went 'ome with the Governor. 'E's a sort of groom to Miss Fanny, when she goes a-ridin' in the Park."

"Hum! Then, as I said before, we must do what we can before he comes. Take me to the stables as a friend of yours, come to see the mare. If I see a chance, I'll do what I can."

"All right, sir, but mind, I ain't goin' to run my 'ead into no traps."

"I don't want you. I'll do all the business. Come in and take a drink before we go back. Remember, I'm a friend, fond of horses."

Burton grinned.

"Yes. Bloomin' fond of 'em when your 'oss wins. All right, sir."

"They went into the grogery, and reissued, taking their way to the stables, where Burton took the visitor down the long row of stalls, talking loudly about the merits of the animals, till they approached a large loose box at the end, at the door of which a sullen looking negro boy was standing, chewing a straw.

Burton waved him away saying:

"This gentleman wants to take a look at Fanny Flyaway, Jim. Get out of the way."

Jim gave a sort of nod, answering:

"Boss's orders was no one to see de hoss, Marse Burton."

"What do you mean, you black scoundrel? Who rules this stable, you or me?"

"You, I s'pose, Marse Burton, but orders is orders, and dis gemman can't get in to see de hoss dis day."

The trainer uttered an angry curse and caught the boy by the throat, flinging him to one side; then entered the loose box, followed by Crooke, while Jim, after a moment's rubbing himself, ran in likewise, and got close to the head of a beautiful sorrel mare in the box, crying:

"You leave that hoss alone, you. Marse Burton, I reports you."

"Shut up your 'ead, you fool," cried the trainer fiercely. "Do you think I don't know my business? I'll send you packing out of this stable, if you don't keep a civil tongue in your 'ead."

And he looked so savage that the boy said no more, but stuck close to the horse's head, watching the stranger out of his rolling eyes, as Burton pointed out to him the various beauties of the animal, which stood all the while looking at them in a startled, innocent way, that showed her to be of a kind, gentle temper.

Crooke listened and answered, walked all round the mare, pretending not to notice the boy, and was going near the manger as if to examine it, when a voice at the door of the box caused them to start, and looking round there was Billy Boots, with a tall bearded gentleman behind him, at sight of whom Crooke turned pale.

Burton, on the other hand, wheeled round and called out angrily:

"How dare you bring strangers in, Billy? Don't you know the orders?"

"Yes, I knows the orders," returned Billy with a look of quiet defiance, "and I know they's changed. Jest take a look at this, ole man, will yer?"

And he handed Burton a paper, which was nothing less than an order for Billy to take charge of Fanny Flyaway and to bring with him any person he might choose to help him in guarding the mare.

"And this here gent," observed Billy calmly, "is a detective, so I'll trouble you to get out of this, all the rest of yer."

Burton ground his teeth.

"So the Governor can't trust his trainer, can't he? Well, I'll show him trainers ain't to be picked up on every bush. Is this boy, Jim, to stay?"

"No," replied Billy composedly; "not but what Jim's on the square; but orders is orders, you know, and I'm going to run this shebang myself, arter this."

Then Crooke and Burton walked slowly out of the loose box, and Nigger Jim followed them, grinning all over his face, while Billy closely examined the manger and hayrack, the detective standing by the door watching the trainer and his friend, who were slowly leaving the stable.

"All right," said Billy presently. "They hain't fixed the feed yet, boss, and if you'll stay by her awhile, I'll go and get her 'lowance out, so's to make all safe."

The detective nodded and observed approvingly:

"You're a deep one for a boy, you are. Go ahead, I'll watch."

When Billy came out, therefore, he went to the oat box and secured as much as he thought the mare would require before next day's race, and then turned to the mare's domicile, and said:

"She'll do now, boss, I'll take care of her. By golly, we jest got here in time, we did!"

The detective smiled and walked out of the box to the entrance, where he found Burton lounging alone, looking particularly sulky.

"Where's your friend?" asked the officer, with an authoritative slap on the trainer's shoulder.

Burton eyed him sullenly.

"What friend?"

"The friend who was with you in the mare's box just now."

"Gone home."

"He is, is he?"

"Yes, he is."

"Do you know who he is?"

"Yes, I know who he is; if I didn't, I'd not be bringing him in 'ere."

"What's his name, then?"

"Do you know?"

"I think so."

"Then why do you ask me?"

"To see if you know. That fellow has more than one name."

"As 'e?"

Burton tried to sneer, but his face was white, and he kept his eyes turned away from the other.

"Yes, he has," was the sharp reply. "and I want you to understand that if I see him round here any more I'll straighten you out, my friend."

The trainer turned round on him with all the bull-dog instinct of an Englishman of the lower classes.

"Who the Dickens are you? Do you want your 'ead punched?"

"Oh, no," returned the other, coolly. "I've not the least ambition that way. If you want to know who I am, just look here."

And he opened his coat to show the small silver shield on his breast.

But Burton, who was a powerful fellow, thick-set and burly, did not flinch.

"I don't care for your shield. It don't give you no business in 'ere, plice, or no plice. I'm trainer of the Governor's stables, and I want you to understand I hain't a-goin' to be put upon by no peelers. I brings in 'oo I wants. You keep to the mare's box, if you want'er, but don't you go to bullyin' me, or I'll punch your 'ead."

He came up close to the detective, whose figure, though tall, was quite slender, and added menacingly:

"I've settled lots of coves like you afore this, and you don't measure enough round the chest to talk to me."

The detective smiled placidly, and put up his hands in a deprecating way, saying:

"My dear friend, keep cool. As long as you keep your place as trainer I shall not interfere with you, but, as I said before, if I see that man round the stables again, I shall take charge of the place and put you out, orders or no orders."

Burton fell back a pace and glared at him savagely, growling:

"You'll put me out—you—you?"

The other saw that there was danger in the trainer, and in a moment his manner changed to one of equal menace, as he said:

"Yes, I, and be civil now, or I'll take the fight out of you in two licks."

Burton ground his teeth, the foam flew from his lips, and without another word he made a rush at the detective, sending out a shower of blows, while the stable boys gathered like a swarm of flies to see the fun, from all quarters.

And they saw it, though it did not last long.

The detective did not even put up his hands to parry, but evaded the other's rush, by a single spring to one side, so that Burton's back was half turned to him for a moment, as the trainer missed his mark.

The next moment, they saw the stranger stoop down, catch Burton by the thigh with one arm, the other pressed against his back, and in a twinkling the feet of the trainer went up, his head down, and he struck the summit of his skull on the stone floor with a violence that rendered him insensible, while his cool antagonist, after standing contemplating him for a moment, turned on his heel and observed:

"Best pick him up, boys, and take him to his room. Tell him, when he comes to, that the next time he tries to interfere with an officer on duty, he may get shot, for I came here to run this stable, and I'm going to do it."

So saying, he walked off to the loose box, looked in and said to Billy:

"Go and get your supper, boy, and be careful what you eat. If you see the man we know outside, keep away from him and go somewhere else. He'll try to fix you, since he can't touch the mare."

Billy grinned and slapped his pistol pocket as he walked out.

"I ain't a-givin' myself away to-day, boss, not to-day, some other day, good-day."

The detective took a long look down the stable between the stalls to where the boys had gathered round Burton, who was now sitting up, looking round him with a dazed stare.

"He'll give no more trouble, I think," mut-

tered the stranger to himself, and then he locked the door of the loose box and sauntered to the entrance of the stable to look after Billy Boots.

CHAPTER XI. THE BITER'S BIT.

NIGHT closed in over the race-course of the Squantum Bay Jockey Club, and the only sound audible was the occasional stamp of a horse in the stables.

There were stables inside and others outside; stables by the track and outside the palings; but quiet reigned everywhere, and not a soul traversed the great desert of ground by the Grand Stand, except the watchman on duty with his lantern.

The night was very dark, for the heavens were covered with clouds, and a fine rain was falling, laying the dust on the track, and freshening the grass after the long drought of the summer.

The twinkling light of the watchman's lantern went bobbing to and fro along the track and across the steeple-chase course inside the railing, disappearing at times; when two men came quietly to the tall outside paling which surrounded the grounds and stood peeping through.

"Now's our time," whispered one, "there's only one watchman on duty, and we can see him before he sees us. Which way, do you think, offers most cover?"

"Under the Grand Stand," said the second man in the same whisper. "There's trees all round it, and we can dodge if 'e comes our way."

"Come along then," was the response, and with that both men climbed up over the paling, no very difficult task, for trees grew close to it in several places.

Once on the top, they did not rest a moment, but dropped over to the turf beneath, taking care to keep their bodies low down in crossing, for fear any one might be looking up against the sky line.

Down in the wet grass both cowered for a while in perfect silence, and then the first man whispered:

"Come on. The lantern's on the other side of the track."

They stole softly across the grass to the Grand Stand, keeping their bodies bent, and were soon under shelter.

All the while not a soul was to be seen, and the watchman's lantern was still moving to and fro on the other side of the track.

On they went, taking advantage of every tree, like a couple of Indians, till they came to an open space of ground, beyond which loomed up the dark mass of the race-course stables.

"Now what's to be done?" whispered Crooke, for it was no other, accompanied by Burton.

"Go forward," whispered the trainer. "Get behind the stables. I've got a key to the 'arf door, and we can get in."

"But we shall be seen," objected Crooke.

"Get hunder the palin's then," was the answer.

Then they stole off in the direction of the palings, keeping to the trees as long as they could, after which Crooke said:

"We've got to crawl. There's no other way. You follow me and do as I do."

He dropped on all fours and crept across the open space that separated them from the rear of the racing stables. A line of bushes grew at the foot of the palings that surrounded the track and their forms were thus rendered invisible in the darkness against the dusky background.

At last they arrived opposite the rear of the stables, and only a space of about fifty feet divided them from it.

But this fifty feet was close-shaven turf.

Crooke paused and whispered:

"Is there a watchman inside?"

"Yes," was the reply.

"Get your Neddy out," said Crooke.

At the same time he drew from his pocket a short stick made of india-rubber, with a large ball of lead at the end.

It was the terrible and noiseless slung-shot, known by the slang term of "Neddy."

Burton imitated his example, and the two men crawled across the turf to the back door of the stable.

It was divided in two halves, after the usual fashion, so that the top might be opened for ventilation, while the lower part remained closed.

Burton rose softly up and felt the upper part of the door.

It yielded to his hand and swung inward, showing it was not locked.

Both men peeped into the stable and saw that the upper part of the front door was wide open, while the interior of the building was dark and silent.

Through the opening they could see the track and steeple-chase course, while the lantern of the watchman could be seen swinging to and fro, as he came toward the stable.

Very slowly and cautiously, their hearts beating with excitement, the two men rose up, and Burton put in his hand to unlatch the lower half of the door.

A moment later they had glided in, the door

swung to, behind them, and they were in the stable.

As they did so, a horse in the next stall began to whinny, recognizing the scent of the trainer, and they heard a voice at the other end of the stable say:

"What's the matter there?"

Without a word, the two prowlers slipped into shadow on each side of the doorway, and flattened themselves up against the wall, grasping their short weapons firmly.

"Who's there?" repeated the voice, and they saw a gleam of light.

No answer came to the query.

Then they heard some one moving, a step approached, and the gleam of light was plainer.

Crooke sidled up against the wall that separated him from the stalls.

Some one was coming along the line of horses, with a dark lantern, as they could see from the narrow shaft of light and the black circle of shadow surrounding it on the floor and walls.

Burton did not advance. On the contrary, he shifted over to the half-door, and laid his hand on the latch.

The trainer knew that the watchman had a revolver, and his heart was already failing him.

Crooke, whose back was turned to the door, did not see this evidence of fear, and staid at the side of the stalls.

And in the mean time, the horses were answering each other all along the line.

Slowly the watchman approached, and Crooke raised the slung-shot.

Already the gleam of light was close by, and a moment later the dark-lantern made its appearance at the end of an arm outstretched, showing that the watchman was a cautious man.

In another moment came the muzzle of a pistol beside the lantern, and the light was turned into the alleyway to the half-door.

Crooke, with a coolness that showed he was no coward, waited.

A moment more, and the front part of a head came into view.

In that instant the slung-shot fell with a dull crash, and the watchman dropped on the floor without a sound, while the dark lantern was extinguished as it descended.

Crooke turned and made an imperative gesture to Burton; for he saw the door open and the figure of the trainer standing there, as if undecided whether to fight or fly.

Then a dead silence fell over the stable, and the horses quieted down.

Crooke leaned over and felt the body of the watchman. It lay perfectly still, and the pistol had fallen from the man's grasp.

The gambler picked up the weapon and put it in his own pocket, then went out into the passageway behind the stalls.

Not a soul was to be seen, and a faint light from a window showed them the door of the loose box, within which the mare, Fanny Flyaway, was kept.

"Now's our time," whispered Crooke. "You have the key of the box? Give it me."

The trainer, with trembling fingers, thrust into the gambler's hand a key, and the bolder villain went quickly on.

When he had reached the door of the loose box, he softly felt the handle and found, as he had expected, that it was fast.

The horses had begun to stamp again, and under cover of the noise Crooke slipped in the key and unlocked the box.

The key was a duplicate, in possession of the trainer, by virtue of his office; and he had taken it with him when he left the stable in the afternoon, after his encounter with the detective.

Softly Crooke pushed open the door and saw, by the light of a large window, the form of the mare, lying stretched at full length on the litter in the box, which was otherwise empty.

Hardly crediting his own success, he stole forward to the manger, and was about to put something inside of it, when the sudden flash of a pistol came from the hayrack above, and the gambler felt a sharp pain in his right shoulder telling him he was shot.

The next moment there was a tremendous struggle in the stable, oaths and cries were heard, with a great racket among the horses, and the voice of Burton shouted:

"Run! run!"

Crooke, for one moment, faltered; then turned and made a dash for the door into the alleyway, found it full of boys and men and realized that he was trapped.

With the courage of desperation he made a dash through the midst of them, took several blows without feeling them, gained the front door and fled across the track and the steeple-chase course into the dark, misty night.

The blood was flowing from his shoulder; but he felt that the wound was a slight one, not impairing his strength, and he soon realized that he was not followed, for the shouts and cries died away behind him.

He crossed the steeple-chase course and the other side of the track; scaled the fence in desperate haste, and found himself at once in wild, scrubby coppicewood and waste ground, where he knew he was safe.

He ran on till he felt sure he was out of sight

and hearing, when he stole on into the village from whence he and Burton had come, and made his way to the grogery over which they both lodged, where he found the trainer already arrived and sitting up in their double room, breathing hard and looking pale.

He had a bad black eye, and had tied up one of his hands with a handkerchief, as if it had been cut.

"Well," he said, gruffly, "ere's a pretty go, all along of follerin' you. Wot am I to do?"

"What do you mean? I don't see what you have to complain of. Nobody knows us, and we got off safe."

"Safe! Look at my eye, I was blessed near gettin' coteched, when I got that lick."

"Did any one follow us?"

"Not as I knows on. They was too blessed anxious arter the 'osses. Mr. Crooke, we're done for. I'll ave to look for another place."

"Why? You're not dismissed yet."

"No; but I shall be, you know."

"Why?"

"Cause, when the guv'nor comes, the 'ole thing is bound to come out."

"I don't see why. You went away in the afternoon, and no one knows who it was got into the stables."

"Look at my eye. The man as gave me that will know it in the morning, and I lost my Neddy in the rumpus."

"Who struck you?"

"I don't know, but 'e it me sich a punch I see'd any quantity of stars. 'Ullo! why what's the matter with you? Your sleeve's all wet and your 'and bloody."

"I got shot. It's a mere graze, or a flesh wound at the worst."

"We've got to wash it, so it don't leave no marks be'ind," said Burton gravely. "I think there's summat be'ind all this as we don't know on. I expected to be folleried, and I wasn't. Why didn't they foller?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," replied Crooke, a little uneasily. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I'm thinkin' they didn't need to. There's me with a black eye, and you with a shot in the shoulder. We're both marked."

Crooke started.

"By heavens, that's so I never thought of it. They think they have us safe in the morning, you at the stable, me at the course, if we make our appearance."

"That's jest it. They've dry us off the course any'ow."

Crooke set his teeth.

"They haven't done it yet. At least they don't drive me off, and they needn't drive you, if you've got any sense."

"Look at my eye... 'Ow am I to 'ide it, and wot am I to say if the guv'nor axes 'ow I got it?"

"Lie out of it, of course."

"That's all very pretty, but the boys 'll peach on me sure."

"Very well then. We'll have to bide the black eye."

"'Ide it! 'Ow?"

"Paint it, to be sure. Isn't there a good black-eye painter round here?"

"Never 'eard of such a feller."

"Well, you don't know much then. I'll have to take you to the city. I know one fellow in Brooklyn, if we could get there. Is there any train to-night?"

"None till 'arf-past five."

"We'll take it. In the mean time, put on a wet cloth to take the swelling down. I'll have you all painted up, so your own brother wouldn't know you'd been in a fight, and we'll get back in time for work. I tell you, Burton, they'll find me hard to beat."

"I should think so," responded the trainer in a tone of admiration. "Blest if you ain't the downiest cove I ever seen. But come, let's get at that shoulder of yours. It won't do to leave no blood round this 'ere room."

Crooke took off his coat and disclosed his shirt sleeve saturated with blood, which was slowly drying, and no longer oozing from the ends of his fingers.

"I'll only wash my hand now," he observed. "Let the blood dry on till I get to Brooklyn. I'll come down to the races in spite of them, and we'll see whether they can beat me."

He washed the blood from his hand, put on his coat again, and watched Burton, who sat bathing his swelled eye.

They remained sitting up till the dawn admonished them of the early train, and then hurried off to take it.

The only passenger besides themselves was a tall slim gentleman, in whom Crooke saw his pet dread, Colonel Plunger.

CHAPTER XII.

THE COLONEL'S DISCOVERIES.

The colonel was fashionably attired, neat and precise as ever, and beamed on the pair from his eye-glasses as he entered the car and took his seat opposite after Crooke. The trainer could no longer avoid settling down. The colonel did not appear to recognize Crooke, but observed, as if to a stranger:

"Ah, good-morning, dear sare! We are onlee t'ree dis morning. Vat a contrast to vat it vill

be in the afternoon, aha! Den we s'all have crowds. You go to Brooklyn?"

Crooke nodded, turned away his head, and began to look out of the window, when the colonel continued to Burton:

"And you too, dear sare. You go too?"

"Yes," growled Burton, unable to avoid answering. "Any fool could tell that. Ain't the train a goin' there?"

"Aha! You live here, sare?"

"Oh! go to Halifax and find out!" growled Burton, who knew of no way to protect himself from curiosity except by rudeness.

"My dear sare, no offense. I come here to studee de human nature. You are fond of de horse, sare? Aha!"

Burton started up savagely.

"You mind your own business! I ain't a talkin' to you. Leave me alone, or I'll give you a punch in the jaw as'll make your 'ead swim."

The colonel drew back a pace, as if to stare at the trainer with more comfort, and went on, with perfect calmness:

"You are in de horse trade, sare, aha! I see you must be. Vere you get dat nice black eye?"

Burton turned scarlet.

"I'll give you one to match it, you spindlegashed fool of a swell, if you don't leave me alone. Do you 'ear?"

The colonel smiled placidly and took another step backward, saying:

"No offense, dear sare, no offense. It is very nice leetle black eye. You go get it paint, aha? So no one know vere you get it, aha? Vere you vas last night, sare? Dere vas trouble, I 'ear, in de stable of de course."

Burton turned pale in a moment, wheeled short round and sat down by Crooke, to whom he muttered:

"Look at that cove! 'Oo is 'e?"

"Never mind. Don't notice him," said Crooke, sharply. "He'll get everything out of you. Just leave him to me."

The colonel had taken a seat in the rear of the car, where he could watch them, and his lip curled with a smile as he saw the two scamps with their heads together.

He waited till the conductor came along for the tickets, and then deliberately took a seat behind them, leaned over and gave Crooke a smart slap on the shoulder, which produced a cry of irrepressible pain.

"What do you mean, sir?" asked Crooke, turning on him savagely.

"Keep cool, sare, keep cool," was the cool reply. "I wanted to see which shoulder was hurt in dat leetle affair, dat is all. I am satisfied, if you are. I know my man. You wish to make trouble. You can do so. I warn you not to come on de course to-day, or you be arrested for de work you try last night."

Crooke, with all his effrontry, turned as white as a sheet, and made no reply. Burton, equally amazed and confounded, sat still, and the colonel got up and moved away to his old position, which he retained until the other men got out of the car, when he followed them at a little distance and saw them enter a house in a shady locality, with a small sign on the door saying:

"BLACK EYES REMOVED."

The colonel laughed and went away to the ferry, which he crossed and took his way up town to the Brunswick Hotel, where he arrived at about half-past six and sent up his name to Frank Noble's room.

The waiter brought back word:

"Mr. Noble gone out riding, sir. Not back yet. Generally in before eight."

The colonel remembered then his own promise to go out to the Park that very morning and on looking at his watch found that it was already half-past six.

He called a cab and hurried off to a well-known up-town stable where he procured a riding-horse and set out on his way up Fifth avenue, already well sprinkled with vehicles and not a few equestrians.

From the way in which the colonel sat his horse and the manner in which he rode up town it was obvious that he was not an ordinary Park equestrian.

He passed such, young and old, going at a sort of funeral pace, keenly conscious that every one was or ought to be looking at them, endeavoring to sit up as they had been taught and all looking as if they were a little, a very little, afraid of their horses.

The colonel, on the other hand, looked as much a part of his animal as if he had been fastened into his saddle, and rode at a sharp trot, as if he were in a hurry, which he was, and impatient of the crowd in his way, which compelled him to turn in and out so often.

When he reached the Fifth avenue gate of the park he had passed quite a number of couples on horseback, but not those he was seeking, nor did he catch sight of Miss Fanny Bloodgood. Her taste for morning rambles seemed to have left her.

Once in the Ride, however, the colonel checked his pace, contrary to the usual custom and lounged slowly along, closely inspecting every one who approached him.

He was looking for Frank and madame.

At last as he turned a curve into one of the

long stretches in the ride he saw at the end two figures coming at a swift gallop and said to himself:

"There they are at last. Now we'll see if Victorine's got him safe."

He pressed his own horse into a gallop and designedly steered over to the left of the path in such a way that a collision became inevitable unless some one pulled up or turned out, and the result was that he and Frank and Madame St. Aure halted within a few feet of each other, when Frank called out angrily:

"What do you mean, sir? Don't you know which side of the road to go?"

The colonel raised his hat to the lady, as he answered:

"Pardon. Vat is de rule in dis countree? In my countree ve go to de left all de time. Is not dat true?"

"Oh, is that it?" said Frank, more placably. "Well, here we always go to the right. You nearly ran into us, sir."

"Well, my dear sare," cried the colonel, "is it possible dat is my friend Noble? I did not recognize you at de first. I ask de pardon of madame and 'ope dat dis leetle accident vill not prejudice her to dislike me."

Madame St. Aure after pulling up had been glancing approvingly over the colonel's tall figure, and she smiled at his words and said to Frank:

"Vy you no introduce me to monsieur? Is dat de vay de gentilhomme be'ave in dis countree?"

Frank awkwardly complied with the request, and then, to his surprise the colonel and madame entered into a rapid and animated conversation in French as if they had known each other for years, while they turned their horses to ride back, leaving Frank almost unnoticed.

He understood a little French, but not near enough to follow them, and there were so many words employed that he had never heard before that they might as well have been talking Greek, as far as he was concerned.

Moreover, they rode at the rapid pace which seemed to be habitual with madame, and Frank was not yet sufficiently used to it to be able to trust himself to his horse.

As they turned a corner on one occasion they nearly ran into another party and all the horses shied.

Frank noticed then that the colonel and madame merely seemed to start with the horses, while he himself was nearly unseated, as were the riders of the other party.

It was, therefore, in a frame of mind the reverse of triumphant, feeling on the contrary rather mortified and as if he had been snubbed, that he at last rode up to the door of the hotel of madame, and here, too, the colonel was in advance of him, off his horse like a flash, and assisting madame to descend, while she laughingly observed to the young man as he slowly dismounted:

"Monsieur le colonel is bon cavalier. You should ride like eem, mon ami. I vil not ask you in to-day, messieurs. Bon jour."

Then she tripped into the hotel, leaving Frank feeling foolish, while the colonel said in a dry tone:

"Vell, my dear boy, do you vant to eat de breakfast to-day? If so it is near de nine o'clock."

Then he mounted, followed by Frank, who was in a regular brown study, and rode away to the stable, where they left their horses, when both returned to the hotel.

The colonel slipped his arm through that of the young man on their way down.

"Well?" he said abruptly, "how you like de madame to-day?"

Frank looked sulky.

"About the same. I don't see why you ask. I don't particularly care about her."

"Aha! dat is right. Yesterday you vas in de dream of her. She vas all dat a lover could desire."

"A lover? I'm not in love with her."

"I am glad of it."

"Of course not."

"But you vas fascinate yesterday."

"Well, she's a handsome woman, isn't she?"

"Dat is mattaire of taste. For me no. She is small, thin, brown, and she speak de bad French."

"The bad French?"

"Certainlee. Did you not hear?"

Frank looked confused.

"I'm ashamed to say I don't understand the language well enough to judge."

"I see. Vell, I tell you. She talk de argot. Dat is de slang of Paris. De ladee of Paris do not understand it."

"But you talked with her?"

"Certainlee. I am old soldier. I see de life an' I talk as de oder talk. See here, mon ami. I tell you yesterday not to trust madame. I tell you to day you go there no more. I know her in France. She is no countess."

"No countess?"

"Certainlee. Dere is no countess in France of dat name, and de French ladee do not ride like dat."

"Like what? I'm sure you can't find fault with her riding. It is superb."

"It is as you say, superb. It is too good. De ladee do not ride like dat."

"What do you mean?"

A new light seemed to be breaking in on the brain of the young man.

The colonel laughed.

"It is no mattaire. She ride superblee. I say no more, but vat I say before. Do not ride wid her, mon ami."

They were near the hotel as he spoke, and Frank asked him, earnestly:

"Won't you tell me what you mean?"

"No. You are of age. You find out vat I mean yourself. Go into de Fourth avenue, also the Third, you find out. Now, I say no more. You go to de race to-day?"

"Certainly, colonel."

"I go, too. Perhaps ve meet dere. By de by, I see Monsieur Bloodgood yesterday, and he is not angree. I dine wid him ven ve come back from de race."

Frank stared.

"Dine wid him? Has he gone as far as that already? I was afraid he would not even receive you on my introduction."

The colonel smiled quizzically.

"My dear boy, I studie de human nature. It is not in dat for a man to be angry wid another for vin money on de horse he is proud to own. I s'all see you at de course to-day. Good-by. No, I cannot take breakfast wid you to-day. I haf engagement. Bon jour."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DRESSMAKER.

MR. CROOKE and his interesting friend came forth from the door of the artist in black eyes, so much altered that no one would ever have known they had been in a fight.

Under the skillful hands of the operator, Mr. Burton's eye had resumed its natural appearance, and only the closest scrutiny could detect the film of paint which covered the black and blue mark, shading into the natural hue of the skin.

To be sure, the corner of the damaged optic was a little bloodshot, but that was nothing, and Burton looked about as usual.

"Take the cars back," said Crooke to him. "Say you've been to Brooklyn; look after the stable as usual, but don't try to interfere with the mare. I'll be on the track as usual, and I've a scheme to get square with them all. Where did you say the address of the girl was?"

Burton gave him an address in Rivington street, New York, and added:

"She's a sewin' gal, older'n he is, and if you can buy her, we may be all right yet."

Crooke nodded and turned away.

First he departed for his own quarters, where he removed his clothes and with them the traces of the accident. He found, as he had suspected, that the bullet from the pistol had only plowed the flesh of his shoulder, the ball making two ragged holes, but touching neither bone nor artery. The blood had dried up and crusted over the place, but shirt and coat were ruined.

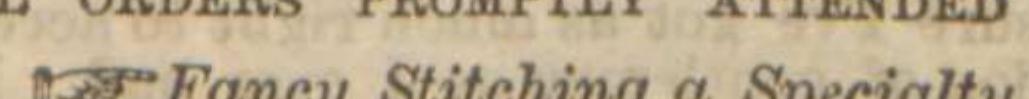
Crooke was a cool and skillful man who had been shot before, and he knew what to do in such a case. He washed off the blood, tore up the damaged shirt and bandaged his shoulder as well as he could by the aid of the looking glass, changed his clothes, and then set out on his expedition, all traces of his night work removed.

His rooms were up town, and he took the cross-town cars into the purlieus of Little Mackerelville, till he arrived at the address given him by Burton, where he found a small two-story brick house, with a modest sign on the door, reading:

MISS MADDEN,

DRESSMAKER AND MODISTE.

ALL ORDERS PROMPTLY ATTENDED TO.

 Fancy Stitching a Specialty.

The advent of the well-dressed, fashionable-looking gambler in that quiet locality made quite a little sensation, and more than one feminine head was thrust from an upper window to see him pass.

He rung at Miss Madden's bell, and heard a great deal of bustle inside, while he was kept waiting nearly five minutes before the door opened. When it did, a flushed female with false frizzies on her forehead, put on in such a hurry that they allowed the natural hair to show its different shade beneath, made her appearance.

"Is Miss Madden at home?" inquired the gambler, with his most fascinating smile.

"Yes, sir," was the reply, as the flushed female looked him over from head to foot, in a half-frightened, half-dazed manner.

"Can I see her?" pursued Crooke.

"Yes, sir—that is—I'm Miss Madden," she answered.

Crooke raised his hat.

"I might have known it from the remarkable personal appearance, for which I was prepared, madam, but permit me to say that my friend Wandle told me only half the truth."

As he spoke he looked down on her with a

sentimental leer, for the young woman before him was decidedly good-looking, notwithstanding the fact that she had false hair and teeth.

"Wandle told me that I should know you by your eyes, madam, and I see he was quite right. Excuse me. May I step in?"

She was evidently both flattered and flustered at the visit, for she said:

"Certainly. Excuse me—but—do you know Mr. Wandle well?"

Crooke held up both hands.

"Do I know Charley Wandle well? Well, I should say I did. The smartest little fellow on the course. Never saw an old hand ride with better judgment than he did when he landed Ambition a winner. Know Charley Wandle? Why, we're like brothers."

"Ah, and—excuse me, but what name did you say?" asked the dressmaker, still holding the door, evidently a little suspicious of the object of the visit.

"My name? oh, I beg your pardon—yes—I am Colonel Plunger."

Her face changed in a moment, and she smiled and bowed, saying:

"I really beg pardon, colonel. Won't you walk up-stairs?"

He followed her into a large front room, where the litter of work showed that she had been busy when disturbed, and where a frowsy-looking young woman with black *real* hair, guiltless of frizzies, was working away at a skirt.

At sight of the gambler, she flushed deeply and bent her head down over her work, but he saw that her face was quite pretty, though the expression was sullen and weary, and the attire slatternly, and he said:

"Quite a cheerful room you have here, Miss Madden. Your sister, I presume."

"No, sir, my assistant, Miss O'Rafferty. Is your call on private business, colonel?"

Crooke bowed and smiled.

"Very sorry to disturb the young lady. I hope I shall not be in the way."

"Oh no, sir," said the girl, in a low voice, as she rose. "Shall I take the work up-stairs, Miss Madden?"

Miss Madden nodded and sent her off, when she took her seat on a sofa and awaited the gambler's communication with ardent curiosity.

Crooke eyed her keenly, and mentally took an inventory of all her qualities.

"Has been very pretty. Knew it. Brown eyes, light hair. Fond of pleasure. Twenty-five now, if she's a day. Got the boy on a string. I'll make love to her."

Then he cleared his throat and observed:

"I suppose you've no idea why I called to-day, Miss Madden?"

"No, sir."

"Well, to tell you the truth, it was partly on business, partly on pleasure. You see my friend Wandle told me so much of you, that I was curious to see you. You know he and I had a little transaction on the course the other day. He told you?"

She looked delighted.

"Yes, sir, it was very generous. You gave him five hundred dollars."

"A mere trifle. But nothing to what I can do for him."

Then he hesitated. In truth, he was feeling his way to how much the girl knew. He felt a presentiment that something had been going on between Billy Boots and the real colonel, and he waited to find out what it was.

Mary Madden hesitated too. Billy had told her all that had passed between him and the real colonel, especially of the promise that the latter had exacted not to marry without the colonel's leave.

So she said presently, with a little pout:

"Yes, you were very kind to him; but I can't say as much for myself."

"Ah, indeed, why not?"

Crooke looked in the most fascinating way possible into the girl's eyes, but she only tossed her head and turned away.

"Oh, you know."

"Indeed I don't."

"Well, didn't you tell him he mustn't marry me till you gave him permission?"

"When did I say such a thing?"

"Why only the night before last."

Crooke understood her then, but he kept on with his questions.

"Did he say I told him he mustn't marry you? When did he say I said it? Where was I when I used those words?"

"Oh, you know well enough. In your own house in Thirty-eighth street."

"My dear girl," said Crooke, smiling, "it was all a mere ruse."

"A what?"

"A mere plan to see you, my dear. Can't you see my meaning clearly?"

"I can't, sir."

"She looked at him quite suspiciously now, and he went on as coolly as ever:

"You don't know who I am; no more does Wandle—Billy Boots, most people call him—"

"I don't," she interrupted, sharply. "It's taking a great liberty to call him any such thing."

"Exactly, my dear, no more do I. But, now,

between you and me, you know, Charley is only a boy, too young for you—”

She started up angrily, her brown eyes flashing.

“How dare you, sir?”

“Keep cool, keep cool. Let me get through. I say he’s too young for you but other people may not be.”

“What do you mean, sir?” she asked, sitting down again, more placably.

“My dear girl, is it possible you don’t see? What’s the use of a handsome, accomplished girl like you, with the eyes of a gazelle and the waist of a fairy, throwing yourself away on a little jockey boy, who’ll never have enough money to keep you as you ought to be kept?”

Now she had turned very red, and her eyes sunk under his, though not for long. A smile she could not repress played on her lips, and she murmured:

“I’m sure I don’t know what you mean.”

Crooke could hardly keep his face.

“Wants it all straight and business-like,” he thought. “Is that the kind you are?”

Then aloud he said, and as he spoke he drew a chair over beside her, and softly laid his hand on her arm:

“I’ll explain fully. I came here to see you, because I’d heard how beautiful you were. I find I didn’t hear half of it. Now, if you are the kind of sensible girl I think you are, there’s no more need of your slaving over this dress-making any more. Do you begin to see what I mean?”

She trembled a little and murmured:

“I don’t understand you. What do you want me to do?”

“That’s business,” he said, in a low tone. “Look here. How would you like to go to the races this afternoon?”

Her face brightened up instantly.

“Oh, wouldn’t that be splendid?”

“Well, you just tell that girl of yours to keep the shanty till we come back, and then you meet me in the Bowery at the Grand street Elevated station, in half an hour. See here. I think we can both have a good time and I’m willing to pay for it. I’m a bachelor, with more money than I know how to spend. Don’t say a word. Spend this for any thing you want. Remember, in half an hour, at Grand street station.”

He pushed a ten-dollar bill into her yielding fingers, patted her shoulder familiarly, and walked out, while Mary Madden, her cheeks flushed with excitement, looked into the glass and thought, triumphantly:

“My beauty’s not all gone yet, I’ve taken that rich colonel a captive. Oh, isn’t he too sweet for any thing? And he’s just dead in love with me. Any one can see that.”

Then she hurriedly called down Miss Katie O’Reilly, who came down this time with her black hair smooth and her dress pulled into neatness.

The sewing girl glanced round the room with an air of such evident disappointment that Mary Madden observed scornfully:

“Oh, you needn’t look. He’s gone, and I’ve got to meet him on business in half an hour. You go on with your work and keep things straight while I’m gone. I shall not be back to-day.”

“But Mrs. MacCarty’s dress is promised for this evening,” objected Katie.

“Mrs. MacCarty will have to wait,” was the impatient answer. “Do you think I’ve nothing to do but wait on her whims? No, girl, I can tell you it may not be for long I shall stay here at all. I’m tired of this slavery and I see a good chance of getting out of it for good very soon. You take care of the place. Tell Mrs. MacCarty, if she comes bothering, that she’ll have to wait my time or go somewhere else. I’m going out.”

And with that she darted up-stairs and began to dress in nervous haste, leaving poor Katie, the drudge, to do as she pleased.

When she departed, Katie muttered:

“I know where you’re going, and you see if I don’t tell your beau.”

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. CROOKE’S LITTLE GAME.

THE enterprising and astute Mr. Crooke was kept quiet a long time under the station of the Elevated Railway, awaiting the coming of his new acquaintance.

He even began to grow apprehensive and impatient, and muttered to himself:

“I ought to have staid and brought her on. Maybe she’s frightened at the risk of going with a stranger. I believe I’ll go back and find her again.”

He was turning round with that intention, when he felt a soft touch on his arm, and beheld one of the prettiest and best dressed women he had seen for a long time, smiling into his face as the lady said:

“Well, colonel, have I kept you waiting long?”

Crooke was delighted at last.

He had seen in the sewing-room, in spite of the disadvantages of dress, that this girl was pretty, though beyond the first bloom of

youth, but the woman beside him looked no more than eighteen.

To be sure, the keen eye of the gambler, trained in all the devices of feminine allurements, detected traces of art in the make up, but none the less it was art worthy of a first class fashionable Parisian.

The face was pink and white, but the powder was invisible, the large dark eyes were really beautiful in themselves, the hair was artistically arranged, of the pale blonde that contrasted so charmingly with dark eyes and brows, and the attire was perfectly bewitching, from the rose pink bonnet with its white veil and the general pale blush hue of the rest of the attire, to the end of a tiny pink boot.

But, with all this beauty, the dress, face and figure were so decidedly out of place at the corner of the Bowery and Grand Street, that even the street boys were staring at her in wonder.

Crooke slipped her hand through his arm and said loudly:

“Why my dear wife, how long you kept me waiting. Come, let us be off at once.”

He said this for the benefit of the street boys, and took her up-stairs to the Elevated train, whispering:

“Had to say it, you know, to put them off the scent. By Jove, you are a beauty and no mistake. I’m proud of you.”

His tone was already familiar, and he gave her arm a squeeze as if he had indeed been her husband, watching her face all the time. She did not repulse him; only smiled, and he thought to himself:

“It’s all right. She thinks I’m in love and want to marry her. She’ll do anything I want her if I’m only hot enough to keep up that idea.”

He waited till he got into the car, in a corner, when he continued whispering:

“I say, Mary, do you know what you look like to-day?”

She smiled and bridled up.

“I’m sure, I don’t know.”

“Wouldn’t you like to know?”

“Well, what?”

“I’ll tell you. A bride.”

This brought a real blush, and she said:

“Ain’t you ashamed to talk so, and call me your wife before every one?”

“No, I’m not. Why should I be? I only wish, I had such a beautiful wife. By Jove I’d be as proud of her—ah wouldn’t I? But that’s no use.”

And he heaved a deep sigh and looked at his boots in a melancholy way, while Mary Madden cast a side glance at him and took in the figure of a handsome man of forty, tall and portly, with a brown mustache, dark eyes, curly hair, and a dress so rich and fashionable, that she was completely captivated.

And this gorgeous being looked so poetic and melancholy, and seemed so much in love with her, that she felt not the least fear of him, but on the contrary rallied him with the kittenish airs of a girl of sixteen, saying:

“Oh you silly man! What in the world can you mean, I wonder? What’s no use?”

“It’s no use wishing for such a lovely wife. Ah no it’s not my luck. I’m doomed always to find these lovely beings divided from me for ever and ever.”

“I don’t see why,” she retorted. “I should suppose you could marry any lady you pleased with your money.”

“Ah, yes, all but one, all but one, and she—unhappy man that I am—I met too late. Oh, Mary, if I’d only known you a year ago.”

“Why?” she asked, slyly.

“Why? Can you ask? A year ago you were a free maid, now you’re promised to one whom we both know.”

“I don’t know anything of the sort,” she said, in a low voice, picking at her parasol. “I’m sure I’ve got as much right to accept the attention of gentlemen as I ever had. I don’t care much for Charley. You know he’s only a boy, after all; but he teased me so.”

The gambler smiled to himself as he saw the fish nibble at the bait, and continued:

“I wish I could think so. You look so like a bride to day. I say, Mary, wouldn’t it be a joke if we were to make a runaway match of it to-day? Wouldn’t it be romantic?”

Again a real blush showed outside the artificial one, and she stirred uneasily.

“Aren’t you ashamed to talk so?” she murmured.

“No. Why should I? We can’t help our hearts, Mary, and I feel as if I’d never loved till the moment I set eyes on you.”

An irrepressible smile curved her lips, and she said, hastily:

“Oh, do stop. Here we are at the Battery.”

“True enough, and now will take the boat. Come along, darling. I declare you look more like a bride than ever. We shall positively have to make it a reality.”

Then he took her down to the boat and said no more till they were securely seated in a corner of the upper deck, when he began again to wheedle and flatter the silly creature, all puffed up as he saw she was with vanity and love of pleasure, till by the time they arrived at the landing of the boat she was chattering away

with perfect freedom, telling him how she had first met her small admirer, how he doted on her, and how hard it was for a poor girl to get on in the world, working for a living.

“And I used to have so many admirers,” she said, with a little sigh. “Never was there a girl with more. But what’s the use of having a pretty face without money?”

“I’ll tell you,” whispered Crooke. “The pretty face will bring you a rich husband, if you know how to play your cards properly.”

“I wish I thought so,” she said, wistfully. “I know it. See here, Mary. I’m a man of the world, and you’re a charming girl with lots of good sense. Say the word, and I’ll make you a lady to-morrow. Throw over this little runt of a boy. He wouldn’t make you a husband. I could take care of you, as your beauty deserves to be cared for.”

“Do you really mean it? You’re not joking at my expense?” she asked, in a low tone.

“Not a bit of it. I’ll marry you to-night, if you like, only—”

“Oh, there’s an only about it, is there?”

The question took him aback a moment, it came so suddenly, and he thought:

“That girl’s no fool. So much the better.”

Aloud he replied:

“Yes, there’s an only. You must understand who I am, and what my wife will have to do. She’ll have to help me.”

“In what?”

“In earning a living, but not in the way you have been doing. No drudgery, no sewing and slaving. My wife will have to use her wits, and always look as beautiful as you are now. She’ll have to live in parlors, with velvet furniture, go to balls, theaters and operas every night of her life. Dress like a queen.”

“I’m sure I could do that,” she interrupted, impatiently. “Is that all? I’ll marry you to-night if you want me?”

“No, it’s not all. I want you to do something for me to-day first, Mary.”

“I thought so.”

“Yes, of course. You’ve got to break off with this jockey of yours.”

“Well, I’m willing to do that, of course.”

“Don’t be in a hurry. I don’t mean at once, and openly. You don’t know me yet. I’m what they call a sporting man. I make bets and win money. You know I paid Billy Boots, to win that race the other day. Now I want you, to-day, to do your best to entice him to lose.”

She nodded her pretty head.

“I’ll do it, if you tell me how to do it.”

“I will. You must send in a note to Billy, that you want to see him. I’ll keep out of the way. Then you tell him he’s got to lose the race in the last heat, and I’ll give him a thousand dollars.”

“But you won’t be such a fool,” she said, with simple astonishment.

“Never mind about that. I told you I’m a sporting man. I spend money like water. By the by, how did you know I gave Billy that five hundred?”

“Why he gave it all to me,” she replied, tit-ttering. “The little fool! I’ve got it here in the bosom of my dress. He’s saving up to get married on it.”

She seemed so utterly unconscious, in the meanness of her selfishness, that she was betraying her lover, that even the hardened sense of Crooke felt a thrill of disgust, but he conquered that in a moment, and replied with a sneering laugh:

“So much the better, Mary. I knew you were a sensible girl; hold on to it, and we’ll consider that so much saved to help buy you a pair of diamond earrings.”

Mary Madden’s eyes sparkled. Few women can resist diamonds, and she was not one of the few.

“And will you really give me a pair of real diamond earrings?” she asked, in a tone of incredulity.

Crooke turned toward her so that the sunshine might glance on the big pin in his scarf. Like most gamblers, he had invested in big diamonds, and he had noticed Mary eye the pin admiringly.

“How do you like that for a stone?” he asked her, indifferently.

“Oh, it’s lovely,” she said, hungrily.

“Well, I’ve got the mate to it, and I’ll have them set for you for a wedding present if you’ll get hold of Billy and wheedle him into losing the race.”

“I’ll do it,” she said, resolutely.

And just at that moment they came to the landing and took the cars to Squantum Bay.

All the way there Crooke kept plying her with flattery, and by the time they reached the course she was completely won over. He took her to the Grand Stand, set her down there and wrote the note to Billy. Then he took her down to view the course, and soon introduced her to several handsome and well-dressed members of his own fraternity, to one of whom he consigned her with a whispered injunction:

“Use your wits now, Mary, and get at the boy somehow. The diamond earrings are yours to-morrow if you succeed.”

He knew his confederate well enough, a foxy

gentleman of the name of Sharpe, for they were, in fact, partners in a quiet little gambling resort up-town, and Sharpe understood his cue very well.

The confederate, who was well known on the course, and had the reputation of being a square better, took Mary round as near the stables as he could, secured a boy and sent in the note.

Crooke watched them from afar, saw the note dispatched, and then turned into the crowd on the quarter-stretch, where he soon spied Frank Noble among his friends, a little the worse for champagne.

The fact was that Frank, since the day he met Fanny Bloodgood and received the cut direct, was growing reckless and desperate.

Colonel Plunger had not made his appearance all day since he parted with him in the early morning, but Kettleton and Courtland had.

And these two young men were living a particularly fast life, so that they were by no means good companions for a generous, free-hearted fellow like Frank, whose only fault seemed an inability to say "No" at the proper time.

Crooke made his way up to him and greeted him with a great show of friendliness.

"Why, Frank, my boy, glad to see you. I hope you're going to give me my revenge to-day as you promised."

"Why certainly," answered the young man, a little thickly. "All you want, old boy. I'll give you a good wrestle to-day. You can't pick out a winner."

"Can't I? Well, we'll see about it. Who are you betting on?"

"Fanny Flyaway, first, last, and all the time. She's going to take the mile heats. Ten thousand even, if you dare."

"Fanny's a good filly, my boy, but not enough for that. What odds do you give?"

"Odds! I'm not giving odds. What odds do you give against her?"

"Two to one."

"Done. I'll take that bet."

And out came the books.

"Now then, inquired Frank, "what horse are you backing to win?"

"Sir Peter Teazle."

"Two to one against him."

"I'll take that for twenty thousand," said Crooke, coolly.

"Oh, hold on, Frank, by Jove that's too much," interrupted Kettleton, thickly.

"You're going too heavy," added Courtland. But Frank, flushed with wine, turned on them angrily, asking:

"D'you s'pose I do no' m'own bizness? I'll take that bet, Crooke. Double it if you like, by Jove. I back m' pinions."

"Done! Double!"

The fatal words were spoken, though even the trained nerves of the Boss Better were unable to keep his face from paling, and he recorded it in his books.

He had bet with a single man sixty thousand dollars.

If Fanny Flyaway took the race he would lose that sum.

If she lost he would win ten thousand.

If a third horse won he would win ten and lose forty thousand.

And it was the first time in his career he had backed a horse. He usually took the safer course of betting against all on the track.

Frank took down the bet gravely, for even he felt the nature of his risk and the loss of sixty thousand dollars is no trifle.

He too was committed to back a single horse, and if Fanny Flyaway lost the race he was in a bad predicament.

He remembered Governor Bloodgood's hatred of betting, and thought that if he lost, the old man would never forgive him.

It was therefore in a decidedly sober frame of mind that he went to the Grand Stand and beheld the Governor and his daughter on front seats with Colonel Plunger seated behind him.

CHAPTER XV.

WOMAN'S WILES.

MR. CHARLES WANDLE, better known as Billy Boots, had just donned the regulation white breeches and boots to go on the track for the first race that afternoon, when one of the stable boys came running to him, saying:

"Hi, Billy, here's your gal wants to see yer; and, I say, she's a reg'lar ripper."

Billy turned on him with ineffable and severe dignity.

"Who are you a-callin' 'Billy'? I want you to understand I ain't none of your low stable helpers now, and my name's Mr. Wandle. What are you givin' me about gals, you sassy rufflin'?"

The boy—he was black as jet—grinned and answered with great contempt:

"White folks gittin' too high-toned to live sense last night, 'cause he shot a buggler. I say your gal's a-waitin' to see yer outside, and she give me this 'ere letter for you."

"Then why didn't yer say so afore, instead of standin' sassin' yer betters?" demanded Billy in high indignation. "You wait till the Governor

comes. We'll hev this ere stable reg'lated arter to-day, we will."

And he snatched the letter from the boy and read it eagerly. Billy's heart was all in a flutter about Mary Madden.

The letter ran as follows:

"DEAR CHARLEY:—

"I want to see you badly and at once. Meet me outside. I must see you on business for both of us.

"Your loving

"MARY MADDEN."

Billy Boots, with all his precocious craft and worldly wisdom in horse lore, was a boy still, from the crown of his jockey cap to the soles of his small boots. Like most boys, he was heels over head in love with a woman older than himself, and had idealized her into an angel.

He trembled all over with delight at the note and asked the black boy hastily:

"Who gave you this?"

"Jest the sweetest gal I ever seen. Dressed to kill. I say, Billy, you're in luck."

Billy said not another word but darted to the glass and donned his lemon-colored silk jacket, with its gorgeous crimson sash, put his crimson cap on his head, and smiled, well pleased, at the reflection, for he looked undeniably handsome and neat in his jockey dress.

Then he hurried out of the stable and saw Mary Madden, in her beautiful but flashy dress, a little way off, leaning on the arm of a thin, languid, handsome gentleman, whom he knew at once as Sharpe, the gambler, one of Crooke's confederates, and the boy's honest heart went down into his jockey boots in a moment.

He stopped short, turned as pale as a ghost, and muttered:

"Mary! Is she a-takin' up with him?"

But Mary Madden had seen him, and she at once left the arm of the gambler and came tripping to meet Billy, beaming with smiles, entirely unmindful of the rest of the crowd, for such a thing as a lady near the stables was an anomaly, and her bright, theatrical appearance aided to attract attention.

"Golly, ain't she sweet?"

"Oh, my! ain't that a daisy?"

"Look at that, boys."

A modest woman would have been frightened, but Mary was only excited, and she ran up to Billy, thrust her arm through his before them all, and walked him off on the track, away from the stables, regardless of his silent, constrained demeanor, while she began to rattle away in his ear.

"Charley, boy, how sweet you do look! Just too sweet for anything! If there wern't so many people looking I'd give you a good squeeze—I really would! You didn't expect to see me, did you?"

"No, I didn't," he answered, soberly; "and I didn't expect to see you with that feller."

"What fellow, Charley? Dear me! if the silly boy isn't getting jealous! Why, what an idea! Charley, you ought to be ashamed of yourself! Do you know who I came with to-day?"

"No, I don't," he replied, shortly.

"Well, I came with your friend, Colonel Plunger, sir! What do you think of that?"

Billy, or Charley, opened his eyes.

"With the colonel?"

"Yes. He came to see me and asked me to go to the races with him, just to see you. And you ain't a bit grateful!"

The boy trembled a good deal now. There was something in Mary's manner that gave him a sense, young as he was, of falsehood, but he could not define the feeling.

"Well," he said, slowly, "I'm glad to see you, Mary; but this ain't no place for you, on the track. The hosses'll be takin' their gallops right off. Look out! here comes one now."

He snatched her away to the side of the track as a powerful bay colt, with two white feet, rushed by them, under a load of blankets, with a little, wiry old man in the saddle.

"That's Sir Peter Teazle," he said; "the only hoss I'm afeard on for Fanny. He's a little too fat, and old Feeny's a-givin' him a sweat afore the race. Well, Mary, what's the business you wanted to see me about to-day?"

She had been used to turning this boy round her finger with perfect ease, and now she beheld in him a new character, quiet, grave and reticent.

She had never seen him on duty before, and the contrast amazed her; but she felt sure of her power, and began:

"Charley, dear, you love me, don't you?"

"You know I do, Mary."

"And you want to marry me as soon as you can, don't you?"

"I did, Marv, but you know the colonel made me promise—"

"I know, but he told me to tell you, since he's seen me, that he took it all back. I told him how we loved each other, and he consented to let us get married, and—what do you think? He'll give us a thousand dollars more, to set up our housekeeping, if you'll only do something for me. You will, won't you, Charley?"

The boy's face flushed and paled at the news, as she had expected, and he stammered:

"Are you sure of this? He told me I was too young to get married—"

"I know it; but I talked him out of that. Will you do what I ask you?"

She spoke a little impatiently, in the expectation that he would yield at once, as he was accustomed.

To her surprise he asked in return,

"What is it, Mary? I don't know if I will or not."

"You don't?"

"No."

"Then all I can say, Mr. Charles Wandle, is that you and me is strangers from this minute, sir. What? I come down here to see you, to ask you a little tiny mite of a favor and you refuse me! I never was so insulted in all my life, never!"

And Mary drew out her handkerchief and began to sob, at which Charley only looked uneasily round and said:

"Don't, don't, Mary. Folks is lookin'."

"I don't care whether they're lookin' or not. You're a real mean boy, so you are, and I don't love you any more"—sob—"not a bit"—sob—"You might do what I ask you, Charley. It's worth a thousand"—sob—"dollars to us."

"What is it, then?" asked the boy, desperate at the sight of his fair enslaver's tears, and at the sound of the tittering in the crowd, not a hundred feet away.

"Will you do it?" she asked.

"Yes, yes, of course. Anything."

"You're a real sweet, good boy, and I'll marry you next week, I will. Oh, Charley, how happy we shall be. Think of it. Fifteen hundred dollars to start housekeeping. And all for such a little thing. Only to let Sir Peter Teazle win the race."

Billy started violently.

"Is that the favor you want?"

"Yes. I don't want it so bad, but the colonel told me to tell you, if you'll do it, he'll give you a thousand dollars."

"It can't be done," said the boy, firmly. "I wouldn't do it for ten thousand. It's no use talking, Mary, you don't know me. I ride to win, and I ride Fanny Flyaway to-day. Did the colonel really tell you this?"

"He really did, I'll take my Bible oath to it, Charley. What a fool you are, to be sure! What do you care, so long as you get a thousand dollars?"

"You don't understand," he interrupted.

"You don't see the point—"

"I see you don't love me any more," she said, sharply. "Never mind, sir, you'll come to your senses after the race is over. You may win on your Fanny, but you'll lose your Mary forever. Thank Heaven I've lots of beaux ready and longing to marry me. Good-by, Mr. Wandle."

"Stay, stop," he cried, desperately to her, as he saw her turning away, and saw the tall, handsome gambler waiting for her. "I tell you what I'll do, Mary. Tell the colonel I must win a heat anyway. If I was put on Sir Peter I could land him a winner, but I can't pull Fanny."

"Very well, sir," she said, coldly, seeing the signs of his yielding. "You can win on your Fanny, but you shall lose your Mary. I've done with you."

She was turning away, when he caught at her dress and whispered with white lips:

"Mary, Mary, for Heaven's sake, don't, don't go away mad. I'll do it for you. I'll do it. But it will be my ruin."

"Not unless you think I'm your ruin," she said, with an arch smile, satisfied to see him yield at last. "A thousand dollars and me for a wife isn't much like ruin. Good-by, Charley. I'll see you after the race, and then we'll be happy. But you must remember that if you don't do just as I say, I'll never see you again."

Then she tripped away, and Billy Boots went thoughtfully back to the stable. He saw her join the gambler, and jealousy filled his heart for the first time, completing the work of the siren.

"I'll do it," he muttered, "and I'll marry her at once. Arter that, let 'em all look out. I can shoot as well as a bigger man. And the boss too! He's turned crooked, has he? I wondered what it all meant. Five hundred to win—a thousand to lose."

As he turned into the stable, there stood Burton, the trainer, in the doorway fresh and smiling. He had come back to the stables in the morning as if nothing had happened, expressed great horror on being told of the attempt over night to inspire the sorrel mare, and had asked after the detective.

But the detective had gone away as soon as daylight came, and no one was on guard but Billy Boots, who told him:

"That ere detective, his name's Jones, and he's gone back to the central office, he has. The mare warn't hurt, but I guess I hit one of the bugglers."

"Glad of it," Burton had answered, smilingly, and he had been unusually gracious ever since his arrival.

Now he greeted Billy cordially, saying:

"You're to ride the mare to-day. I hope you'll win. To tell you the truth I've put all the money I'm worth on her and if she loses I'm out five hundred dollars."

"You are, are you?" said Billy.

"Yes. So do your best with Fanny. You have the best of the weights anyway and ought to be able to do it."

Billy made no answer, but walked into the stable to get his saddle, for the weighing bell had begun to ring.

Five minutes later he was on his road to the weighing paddock, thinking over the—to him—inscrutable problem why Colonel Plunger should have changed his mind and want him to to lose the race.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MILE HEATS.

FRANK NOBLE when he saw the Bloodgoods on the Grand Stand, with his friend, the colonel, close beside them, hesitated what to do. He was in that peculiar condition that he was conscious of the muddling of his faculties and not over anxious to meet ladies.

His friends Kettleton and Courtland were not so scrupulous and better seasoned.

Moreover, they saw their friend Howard Smith, usually a member of their party, sitting on one side of Miss Bloodgood, and they both advanced, so that Frank had either to follow or be left alone behind them.

He made a few steps after them and his courage failed him. He turned, left the Grand Stand, and mingled with the crowd below, while his friends kept on talking and laughing loudly till they had joined the Governor's party, to be received with distant *hauteur* by the old man, who detected their condition in a moment, and to be left entirely unnoticed by Miss Fanny, who kept her shoulder turned toward them while she conversed with young Howard Smith who was quite sober.

As for Colonel Plunger, he favored them with a frigid bow, and turned away to look down at the crowd below, so that the young men in spite of their artificial courage could not help feeling mortified and rebuffed.

Frank Noble, who was rapidly sobering down, saw them from afar, and muttered:

"Glad I didn't go there. Confound the wine. I believe I'll never touch another drop in the daytime. I've lost my chance to make it up with Fanny."

Then he saw the colonel get up, say a few words to the Governor, and move off, pointedly avoiding the young men.

A little later he spied Crooke coming through the crowd, with a young and very pretty girl on his arm, dressed in a brilliant theatrical style that reminded him of a ballet girl, and saw the Boss Better take this girl up to the Grand Stand, and assume a place on the front row contrary to his usual custom, as if he had given up betting for the day.

Frank, alone in a crowd of strangers, felt out of his element and made his way to the quarter stretch, where he soon found numbers of acquaintances, bantering him for bets, in the midst of whom he was discovered by Colonel Plunger, who ran his arm through Noble's, and said:

"My dear boy, glad dat I find you. Come vid me. I haf made it all right for de Gouverneur and Miss Fannee."

"Made what all right?" asked Frank, in a rather sullen tone.

"De leetle quarrel, my boy. You s'all come vid me, and it vill all be forgot. You have not bet to day, haf you?"

"Yes, I haf—heavily," said Frank, doggedly. "I'm in to win sixty thousand or lose anything from forty to sixty."

The colonel started.

"On vat horse?"

"I backed Fanny Flyaway, and bet against Sir Peter Teazle with Crooke."

The colonel looked relieved.

"I am glad it is no worse. You vill vin de bets. But I gif you varning. Dis Crooke vill be rule off de course at de next race. I haf de evidence, and it vill be given at de meeting. Now, you come to de Grand Stand with me."

Frank colored deeply.

"I dare not do it, colonel. The fact is, I have been drinking too much, or I might not have made those bets."

The colonel looked vexed.

"Dat is bad. You haf not the temperament dat can drink. You cannot afford it. I must stay vid you to-day, till you are fit to go up to see de ladee. I promised to bring you. Aha, dere go de bell. Now ve s'all see de race."

They pressed to the front of the quarter-stretch, and the jockeys rode the horses from the weighing paddock to the start, passing in review before the admiring crowd.

As Feeny, the little, dried-up jockey, made his way to the post, they noticed that the bay colt, Sir Peter Teazle, was fractious and full of capers, rearing and jumping in a way that delighted the crowd, but which brought from the colonel the remark:

"Dat horse vill not take de race, but de first heat may be his."

Presently Billy Boots, in his lemon and crim-

son, rode by on the sorrel mare, and the colonel said, approvingly:

"Dere is de vinner. Look at de quarters of dat mare, and how nice she behave, just like de ladee."

He seemed so unwontedly enthusiastic that he actually waved his hat, and cried out:

"Billee! Billee! Good boy! I double him. I double him. You do as I say."

And Billy Boots heard him, turned in his saddle, flashed a quick glance over the martial figure of the unknown sport, and muttered to himself:

"It is true arter all. I didn't believe it. Oh, Mary, Mary, to think you'd give in to sich a plot. But I can't do it, I won't do it. I must win a heat any way, and I believe there's a mistake somewhere. He can't have turned crooked. He must be a tryin' of me to see if he can depend on me. Tain't like him to be crooked, arter last night's work. He can't mean it."

The poor boy was so absorbed in his mental struggles that he almost forgot his business as a jockey at the start. He had all the instincts of a soldier, true to his flag, and yet the temptations to play false were nearly irresistible:

He was recalled from his reverie by the loud voice of the starter.

"Steady there, all of you. Stop jerking those horses. Walk them down slowly. All ready. Go!"

The next moment they were off, eleven horses, Sir Peter Teazle with a two lengths start, and Fanny Flyaway in the tail of the ruck.

Then all Billy's instincts as a jockey woke in him, and in a moment he had forgotten Mary Madden, Colonel Plunger, and everything in the world but the race. A mile course is a short one, and Fanny Flyaway was fresh from the stables. Before they reached the quarter pole, the mare had cleared the ruck and was running third, four lengths behind Sir Peter Teazle and an other colt.

Billy gathered up his reins a little, gave Fanny a touch of the spur and the fleet creature responded by closing the gap to a single length at the half-mile pole and collaring Sir Peter at the first yards of the home stretch.

Then and not till then, Billy put on the whip, and uttered a yell of encouragement to the mare, old Feeny following his example on the colt.

The mare answered the appeal by laying back her ears and redoubling her speed, the colt tried it for a few yards and then dropped his head and "quit," so that Billy won in a canter by four lengths, amid yells of applause.

The first heat was over and the horses were blanketed and walked up and down to cool, while Billy, pale and nervous, looked round toward the Grand Stand, and saw his enslaver, Mary Madden, on the front row, looking down on the course. And then the boy's heart gave a furious bound of jealousy, as he saw beside her, for the first time, Crooke, the Boss Better. The gambler was talking earnestly to her with a frowning face, and she was listening to him in a scared manner.

Then he saw her actually rise and come down into the crowd—a thing he had not believed even her to be capable of—till she made her appearance at the railing and beckoned to him.

He went over at once to her, and she said in a low angry tone:

"Is this your promise? Do you want to lose me forever? Take care, sir."

"I told ye I had to win one heat," said Billy apologetically.

"See that's the last then," she whispered fiercely. "I mean what I say. I'll marry another to morrow if you don't keep your word."

The boy turned deadly pale.

"Ye wouldn't do that, Mary, not that man I saw ye with, would ye?"

"Just that man. He's as rich as a Jew, and dead in love with me so you see I'm not wanting a husband. I'll be true to you, if you'll be true to me. If not—you know."

And she turned round again and took the arm of that useful Sharpe, who was waiting to perform the office, when they marched off, and Billy took his lonely way to the stable.

He found the mare being rubbed down by the boys while Burton greeted him with the remark:

"Well done, Billy you're a-gettin' to be a reg'lar jock now. Take the next 'eat and you're hall right. Jump fur the lead and 'old it. She'll stand all you give 'er. Old Feeny can't bring in Teazle. The 'oss ain't game. 'E flinches from the whip."

Billy nodded.

"Ay, ay, I know."

Then came the bell again, and the horses came up for the second heat, reduced to nine now, for two had been taken off as hopeless.

The second heat was marked by an early start, and, as before, wary old Feeny got the best of the start and kept the lead all the way to the half-mile post, when he laid on the whip lustily before his horse was tired, and retained two lengths advance all the way to the home stretch.

And by that time it was too late for Billy Boots to win, and he saw it too and saved Fanny

Flyaway, so that Sir Peter Teazle's number was run up on the blackboard as the winner of the second heat, and the other horses were sent to the stables.

The deciding heat remained to be run between the colt and the filly, with no others to confuse them.

And as Billy rode up to the starting-point for the last time, he caught sight of an open carriage on the regular carriage stand, close to the railing, and in it sat Mary Madden, bright and fresh as a rose, watching him, with the ever smiling and languid Sharpe beside her. Billy tingled all over with jealousy, but the sight produced on him exactly the effect the astute Crooke had foreseen.

It took his mind off the race, presented the picture of his beautiful enchantress going off with another man if he did not obey her orders implicitly, and settled his last doubts as to Colonel Plunger having turned traitor.

Then came the start, and away went the colt and the filly side by side in a splendid struggle which called forth yells of delight.

They were neck and neck at the quarter-mile pole, when Fanny forged half a length ahead. At the half-mile pole Teazel was leading by another half length, while at the home stretch both were neck and neck.

Then both jockeys put on the whip at the same time, and the colt gained a neck, old Feeny yelling like a madman, Billy Boots appearing to do the same.

Yard by yard they came nearer, a wild yell going up from Teazle's supporters, till almost at the finish, when the colt, under a last savage cut of the whip, gave a bound that increased his lead and raced in a winner by half a length.

Crooke, standing by the carriage close to Mary Madden, squeezed her hand and whispered:

"You darling little angel, I'll marry you to-night, and the diamond earrings are yours to-morrow. I've won sixty thousand dollars through you. Let Sharpe take care of you till I come to see you again. I don't want the boy to see me. Meet me outside, and we'll drive home."

The ever useful Sharpe was sitting on the other side, and to him Crooke whispered his instructions, after which he darted off to find Frank Noble.

To his surprise and satisfaction he met the young man coming up the stairs alone, and Noble said quietly:

"You've won: I've lost. It may be the best for me in the end. I shall never bet at another horse race, I think. The colt was the best horse. Here's your cheque. I'm done for the season."

He handed Crooke a cheque, and the gambler read it hungrily.

"Pay to the order of Stephen Crooke, sixty thousand dollars."

FRANK NOBLE.

He took it with affected reluctance.

"Don't discommode yourself, old fellow. I can trust you for the money. Pay it at your convenience."

Frank shook his head as he answered:

"It makes us even again. I won it from you on Ambition. I never beg. Good-day."

And he turned away coldly. Crooke gazed after him with a sneer.

"For all that, I'll get this cashed the first thing to-morrow. Hallo, who's that?"

He saw the gleaming spectacles of Colonel Plunger at a little distance observing him.

CHAPTER XVII.

BRATEN.

THE colonel's face was pale and fierce as he looked at the gambler, but he did not approach him, and the Boss Better hurried away to the gate, where he found the ever faithful Sharpe in waiting with the fair and deceitful Miss Madden, with whom he drove away in a hired carriage at once.

As for Colonel Plunger, for the first time since his appearance on the scene he looked angry and worried. He hurried off to the track, not noticing Frank, and hunted up Billy Boots, to whom he said sternly:

"Well, Billee, and vy did you pull de mare in de home run?"

Billy was very pale and sad looking, but the question seemed to rouse him to anger, for he retorted:

"You're a nice duck to ax that question. Why did I pull her? Why did you get hold of Mary and send her here to worrit me? I didn't pull the mare."

"You did not urge her. She could have taken de race, and you know it," said the other, still more sternly.

Billy turned crimson with anger.

"And do you mean to say you didn't send me word to lose?"

The colonel stared at him amazedly.

"I? Send you word to lose? I?"

"Yes, you! Sent Mary to tell me you'd give me a thousand dollars to lose."

"Mary? Who's Mary?"

"You know well enough. My gal, that you didn't want me to marry. You've be'n to see her—"

"I? I never saw her in my life."

Billy started back, beside himself with anger, and looked wildly round.

"You wait here," he said, hurriedly. "I'll find her and find out what's be'n done. I ain't no sucker, I ain't."

He darted away into the crowd, and the colonel turned round to confront Burton, the trainer, who gave him a sort of nod and leer, as he observed:

"We ain't off the track yet, are we? You're a great detective, you are, getting up burglar alarms to frighten the Guv'nor; but it didn't work worth a brass farden, did it?"

The colonel looked at him and calmed down in a moment, as he answered:

"My friend, I do not know you; but if you continue to address any impudent words to me, I shall be obliged to chastise you as my friend Jones did yesterday. That black eye is well painted, is it not?"

Burton tried to look him down, but the effort was a failure, and he turned away with the sneering remark:

"All right. We'll see 'oo's a'ead next time."

The colonel also turned away, but with a lowering brow, into the crowd, and soon spied the jockey cap of little Billy Boots coming back.

The boy had a pale, scared look, and he seemed ready to cry as he burst out:

"She's gone, boss, she's gone. I don't see her nowhere. What does it all mean?"

The colonel took him by the arm and led him to one side, saying:

"It means we have been beaten once. Have you any more races to ride?"

"No," said Billy, dejectedly.

"Go and put on your common clothes and meet me under the Grand Stand. I will wait under that tree."

Billy noticed that the colonel's accent had almost disappeared, and he went away to the stables with a glimmering of the truth dawning on his mind.

As for the colonel, he remained leaning against the tree he had indicated till the return of the boy, when he led him off to a quiet seat at the back of the Grand Stand, and said quietly:

"Sit down, Billee. Now tell me what dis means. You say your Maree come and tell you something. What was it?"

Thus urged, Billy told the whole story of his involuntary seduction from the paths of rectitude, and added earnestly:

"She couldn't have done it any other way, boss, without your name. Did you tell her?"

"No, Billee. I do not know her. I never saw her. Who was with her?"

"Crooke, sir; the Boss Better."

"I thought so. Give me de girl's address, my boy. I go hunt dis out, and I save de matter from going further. At de same time, Billee, you did wrong. Even if I ask you to lose race, if the Gouverneur himself ask you, it is wrong. You ride to win, not to lose. You are boy. Dis Crooke have bought your girl. I told you she was too old for you. She has betray you and have gone off wid him."

Billy's eyes gleamed dangerously.

"If she has, boss, so much the worse for both on 'em. That gal swore she loved me, and promised to marry me."

The colonel patted his shoulder softly.

"My poor boy, you are not de first, and will not be de last dat has been deceived by a woman. Take my advice. You let her go. I told you she was too old; now I say she is not good enough for you. I am going to de Grand Stand now, to see de Governor. He know not'ing of dis. I am de only man, perhaps, dat knew you pulled de mare. You was deceive by oders. Now promise me, Billee, you will never lose a race again. Take heed to not'ing dat is said to you. Win your races. I pay you to win, never to lose. Dere is one more race yet, next week. Ambition is in it. You shall ride him. Can he take de four mile?"

"He kin do it, boss, if I ride him, and there ain't no more shenannigin 'bout pullin' hosses. I'll win that race."

"Very well, Billee. You do it, and we shall make up our loss."

Then he shook hands with the boy, and went away to the front of the stand, where Governor Bloodgood and his daughter were seated, looking down at the course and pretending to take an interest in the next race, but succeeding poorly; for the Governor had a gloomy, dissatisfied air, and no friends were near them to console with the owner of the beaten horse. The colonel took a seat next to the old man and observed:

"Well, monsieur, fortune has not smiled on us to-day."

The Governor's frown cleared away as he said, more cheerfully:

"But that need not hinder us from enjoying the rest of the races, monsieur. Of course you remember that you are engaged to dine with us at six."

"My dear sare, I shall take pleasure in the engagement. But now I must leave dis place and your society, for I have a little work to do. It is a misfortune to lose a race, but you are fortunate in not losing money also."

"Yes," observed the Governor dryly, "and I wish some of our young men would take that lesson to heart. Have you seen that young Noble to-day? I hear he has been betting heavily again, and has lost a considerable sum."

The colonel nodded.

"It is true, sare; but remember he lost it in backing your horse. I wish, sare, I could take a liberty with you."

"What is it, monsieur?"

The old gentleman's tone was cold, and he drew himself up slightly.

"It is, sare, to ask leave to bring the young man to dinner with me to-day. Believe me, he needs all the assistance we can give him in the right way, and if we are too distant and severe with him, he may be offended and act rashly."

The Governor's face had become set in the selfish mask of a rich man, used to having his own way. The colonel saw it, and saw also the face of Fanny Bloodgood, on the other side of her father, turned away and looking cold and severe. The young lady had been introduced to him earlier in the day, and had greeted him with a frigid bow and a few commonplace words.

Then the Governor said coldly:

"I am sorry to say it, monsieur, but, under present circumstances, the young man would not be welcome. I fear that he is leading a wild and dissolute life so far as I can hear, and if some reports are true, he has even been seen in public with a woman of notoriously bad character with whom he rides openly in the Park. I fear, colonel, in the goodness of your heart, you do not know this young man as I do."

The colonel shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear sare, in France we have a little saying, 'Youth fears nothing.' It is very possible our friend may be rash, but it is the part of age to advise. I have interest in the boy; in short, I love him. I wish to expose him to good influence. Will you not help me?"

He saw that the cold face of the young lady was softening, and she shot him a glance of gratitude; the first indication of interest he had observed in her; but her father's face was harder than ever, as he replied:

"I fear I must decline the office of teacher to a pupil who would reject my advice. Please let us drop the subject, colonel."

There was no mistaking the tone in which he spoke, and Colonel Plunger, on his part, drew up with equal stiffness, saying:

"It is well, monsieur. I crave pardon for my boldness, and will bid farewell."

He bowed with great ceremony to the old millionaire, and was greeted for the first time since their introduction by a smile from Miss Fanny.

Then he went hurriedly away into the crowd, searching for Frank Noble, and found him at last, with his bibulous friends, Kettleton, Courtland and Howard Smith, down at the bar, drinking a fresh bottle of champagne, all hands on the high road to a grand spree.

The colonel noticed them, and uttered a heavy sigh, as he murmured to himself:

"How like! how like!"

Young Frank Noble's handsome face was flushed, his blue eyes had a wild glare, and he was talking and gesticulating in an excitable way, frequently striking the bar with all his force, to emphasize what he was saying.

Frank Noble, sober, was quiet, modest and gentle; the same man flushed with drink, was fast becoming an intolerable maniac. As soon as he saw the colonel, he greeted him with a boisterous yell.

"Here's my veteran of the cold blood. Colonel Plunger, gentlemen, by name and nature. The moral old fellow who gives me good advice, by heavens, and dips into all the wickedness afloat, just to see what it's like. Hey, colonel, hey? What d'ye say, old boy? Here, quick, another bottle of dry monopole! Hurry up, you lazy dog. Gentlemen can't wait for your convenience. Now, colonel, a toast, a toast! Give us a toast."

The colonel saw that it was no use to try advice in the boy's present state, so he affected to join in with the noisy crowd, and allowed them to drink the next bottle, in the hope that it would so far stupefy Frank as to render him sensible of his condition.

Then, in a pause of the wrangling into which conversation is apt to degenerate among drunken men, he said to Frank:

"What are you going to do to-night?"

"Buck the tiger, by heavens," cried Frank, exultingly. "A short life and a merry one! Hey, old sobersides! That's your sort. I'm going to back my pile against old Crooke's, and smash him, or die in the attempt. Hey, Kettleton! We've got it all made up, haven't we?"

The other three young men noisily gave their assent, and the colonel soon learned what they meant.

Frank, after his heavy losses, had found Kettleton and the others disconsolate over certain amounts which they themselves had lost, and had easily yielded to their counsel, to drown their sorrows in the flowing bowl.

It was before they had completely fuddled themselves that one of them had suggested the plan of getting even with Crooke that same

evening by playing poker at the club and the others had taken it up with all the avidity of young men, each of whom fancies that he can play the fascinating game of poker a little better than any person to be found in America.

The colonel listened to all, and did not interpose a word of objection. He saw that it would be useless in the excited state of the young men.

He only asked permission to join the little party, to which Frank replied, thickly:

"Why, cert'nly. Why, you're gettin' to be a reg'lar old sport, you are, by Jove. Who'd thought it, boys? Looks like a parson and bets like an old sport. Where'd you come from anyhow, colonel? You seem to be up to all the tricks. Sly old fox, hey?"

The colonel smiled innocently.

"I do not understand de game, my boy, but you s'all teach me. I study de human nature, dat is all. Come, you have drank enough, if you play de pokaire to-night. I insist you come away, all of you, to keep de clear head for to-night."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DECADE CLUB.

THE most exclusive of the clubs in the good city of Gotham is the "Decade." Its membership is strictly confined to the "Upper Ten," from which it was named long ago, and as the "Upper Ten" implies a larger number of people, it was agreed, at the foundation of the club, that the word "Ten" should be held to mean "ten thousand."

Thus the membership of the club is practically unlimited, so long as the applicants belong to a certain class of society in Gotham, and it was agreed that this class should be confined to men who were able to say that they had a grandfather or great grandfather who owned property in Gotham within ten years after the Revolution. This little provision, so admirably simple, had hitherto served to keep out of the club all "low persons," as the members put it, and the rule was only relaxed by the committee in the case of men who could show a million of dollars and a father who had made that sum.

The Decade Club was situated in a quiet side street leading to one of the great squares, and had the best cook in Gotham, to whom the club paid a salary of six thousand dollars a year.

The waiters were fat and elderly, with an air of chilling respectability that frightened away all poor visitors, and a knack of waiting round for fees on the smallest of pretexts; while the prices of dinners were only low as compared with Delmonico's.

In the part of the club which looked out on back yards and brick walls, were the private dining rooms, where members entertained their friends, and it was part of the duty of the waiters to see that the cards, which were called for after dinner, were furnished promptly.

One of these rooms was known as the "French," another the "German," a third and fourth as the "American" rooms, from a sort of tacit agreement that the games to be played in each should be of a certain character, but the "American" rooms were used twice as much as the others.

One of these rooms contained a faro table, the other a large round concern, covered with green cloth, on which the national game of poker was played in a style that would have astonished a native of Kentucky, used as those gentlemen are to heavy stakes.

Into that room more than one gilded youth had entered with a large fortune, to emerge a beggar, through the enticements of a game where the "ante" was five dollars, and the betting unlimited.

If it be asked how was it the police never got hold of this club, the answer is easy. The police did not dare interfere, for the city government was always represented in the club, no matter what party was in, and it would have been as much as the places of the policemen were worth to attempt a "raid" on such a high-toned concern as the Decade Club.

Moreover, it must be said that the games in the Decade were conducted strictly on fair principles. No one was coaxed in, and it was voted "bad form" for any one to complain of his losses, however heavy. The ruined men simply went away from the club and were no more seen, and there had never been, in the whole history of the institution, an instance of cheating, if we except a legend that prevailed of an incident of twenty years before, which Frank Noble told to Colonel Plunger just before they sat down to dinner.

The colonel saw that the young men had had time to sober down in the afternoon, and they were waiting for the arrival of Crooke, who had been summoned by a note of invitation. It was while they were waiting, that Frank looked round the room and said:

"Do you know, boys, this room has been a very unlucky one for my family."

The colonel looked interested and asked:

"How so, sare?"

Frank uttered a slight sigh, and his face was graver than usual, as he answered:

"It's quite a sad story. An uncle of mine was ruined in this room, twenty years ago."

"Ah, indeed?" observed Kettleton; "was this the room where Paul Malcolm got into that scrape? By Jove, old fellow, I'm sorry you had such an unfortunate relation. I've heard my father talk of that night, and he said he didn't blame Paul."

"And who was dis Paul Malcolm?" the colonel asked, in a low voice.

"My mother's only brother," said Frank, rather sadly. "I never knew him, poor man, and I never heard much good of him from my grandfather Malcolm; but my mother always told me that if ever I heard any one decry his memory, I was to defend it, for he was not as bad as they said."

The colonel nodded absently and muttered:

"Is that all? Not so bad as they said?"

"Indeed they said—at least my grandfather did—very hard things against him. But be that as it may, it was in this room that he lost to one of his friends so large a sum that his father refused to pay it, and turned him out of doors."

"Indeed, sare? And how did he lose it?"

"At poker. But the real trouble was, that in his case the game broke up in a quarrel, in which Paul Malcolm accused his adversary of cheating at cards, and the result was that, being unable to prove his charge, he was expelled from the club, and at once left the country."

"And his antagonist, who was he, sare?" the colonel asked, curiously.

"That's the saddest part of the story. He was in those days a handsome fellow, wild but honorable, as every one thought, and the idea of his being unjustly accused by my poor uncle made every one his friend. But in less than two years after, he was detected really cheating at another game, and in his turn was expelled in disgrace."

"Yes," observed Courtland, soberly, "I've often heard my father speak of it, and say that he believed after all, Paul Malcolm had been right. But it was too late for Paul's fair fame. Lester was driven away, but the next thing we heard of Paul was that he had been killed in Mex co, and no one has ever heard of Lester since that day."

"And dis Le-taire, sare," inquired the Colonel, who seemed much interested, "do you mean to say no one has evaire seen him since?"

"No."

"And you are sure he has never come to de city again?"

"No. That is, not that I ever heard of, or some one would have known him."

At this moment Crooke entered, bluff and burly as usual, his hearty laugh and frank ways ingratiating him with every one, and it was not till they were seated at table that the colonel went on speaking to Courtland, saying:

"Dis Lestaire, sare, dat cheat at cards, I am curious to hear of him. Vat sort of man vas he like?"

"I'm sure I don't know, colonel."

"Did you evaire see him, sare?" asked the colonel, addressing Crooke directly.

The Boss Better stared at him frigidly.

"See whom, sir?"

"A man called Lestaire, dat dey say did cheat at cards in dis club twentee year ago, sare."

"If No. How should I? I've only been a resident here for about three years," was the hasty answer. "I don't know any of these twenty-year-ago scrapes."

The colonel smiled placidly.

"Pardon, sare. I had an idea you might, on account of your age. Monsieur Noble, did you ever hear dat Lestaire describe?"

Frank nodded.

"Yes; I've heard my mother say he was tall and thin, with a handsome face, brown eyes and hair—that's all."

"And was dere not some mark dat he might be known by, sare? De thin people may become fat in de old age."

Frank hesitated.

"Well, I've heard that he had a scar on one temple, received in the quarrel with my uncle, who knocked him senseless and cut the side of his face open with one blow; but that wouldn't identify him if he were alive. Besides, what's the use of discussing it now? Both are probably dead and buried."

"Ay, ay," broke in Crooke, with a harsh laugh. "Both are dead. Here's to their quiet rest."

And he drained off a glass of wine at a gulp, and dashed into conversation with a brilliancy that always charmed his younger auditors, telling them stories of adventure in other lands, and displaying a cynical philosophy and knowledge of the world that amused and interested them all.

All but the colonel.

Every one noticed that he was silent and abstracted during the dinner, and said nothing unless he was questioned.

Once, when Kettleton appealed to him on some point about French customs, he answered in an absent way:

"I do not know, sare. I have not been dere so long—dat is—I beg pardon—vat did you say?"

"Oh, never mind," retorted Kettleton. "If

you were a younger man, colonel, I should say you were in love."

The colonel tried to laugh.

"You are please to be merree, sare. I was t'ink of de past in dis room, vat tale it could tell of de passion, de love, de hatred in de world. I t'ink of dat Lestaire, dat villain dat ruin so many home, dat wreck the life of so many. Pardon. Ah, Monsieur Crooke, you are more and more like a man I once know in California. His name Sharplee."

Crooke's color flickered as he said:

"Oh, humbug! Suppose he was like me, what's the difference? There are lots of men look like me."

"Who was this Sharply?" asked Howard Smith, with a drawl. "Seems to me I've heard the name before?"

"Yes, sare. I doubt not. He was hung by de Vigilance Committee—dat is, he was ordered to be hanged, but allowed to escape if he would quit de countree, which he did. I have often wondered if dat was his real name. He was a tall, thin man vid de brown eyes and hair, and de Californian dey call him de 'Scarface Sharp.' He haf a cut on de side of his face, just as you say dat Lestaire have. Yet it is very strange. He was de very image of Monsieur Crookedere, all but de scar. I see monsieur do not have any scar on his face."

All eyes were instantly turned on Crooke, who was seen to be flushed and angry as he retorted:

"Well, I must say, you're choosing a queer theme in the misdeeds of the fellow that looks like me. I'm sure I can't help personal resemblances. Now you speak of it, I remember hearing of the same man in California, but I never saw him. I'm told he was drowned at sea in trying to get to Australia."

Colonel Plunger had been watching him keenly, and interjected:

"Dey said so, sare, but I had ocular evidence dat de man did not die. I saw him at de race de oder day, and he did recognize me. I tell you, sare, dat man is alife, and in de citee tonight. But of vat import is it to talk of him? Come, messieurs, I am quite curious to see dis American game dat you call pokaire. In France ve play *ecarte* and *piquet* and *baccarat*, and de *rouge-et-noir* and *roulette*, but I haf not seen dis game you call pokaire. How do you play it?"

Kettleton laughed as he said:

"Oh, it's simple enough. We'll soon show you the rules, but I warn you it will cost you a good deal of money to learn it. Hey, boys, what d'ye say?"

They all laughed, and Frank observed:

"Yes, colonel, don't you try it among such a lot of sharps as we are. Why, the boys would skin you alive. Poker's our national game, and foreigners don't stand any chance at it. Come, waiter, clear away the dinner and bring the cards. You can look on, colonel."

"I t'ank you, sare. I's all do so for a leetle while. I do not understand de game, but I vill try to learn."

CHAPTER XIX.

A LITTLE GAME OF POKER.

TEN minutes later, five gentlemen were seated round a green table, each with a little pile of counters in front of him, in white, red, green, and blue ivory.

Four of the gentlemen were young, the fifth of middle age, while a sixth, who was quite gray and wore eyeglasses, sat next to Frank Noble, between him and Crooke, and looked on at the game with great apparent interest and curiosity.

Colonel Plunger was, in fact, a marvel of innocence at the mysteries of poker. He asked questions innumerable about the rules of the game before the cards were dealt, and received much instruction in return from the younger members of the party, who were excessively amused at finding a man past forty who did not understand the great American game of poker.

To be sure they were very accommodating, and tried to make the game clear to the innocence of their visitor.

Kettleton told him how many cards were dealt, what was the meaning of the expressions "eldest hand," "holding the ace," "anteing," "chipping," "blinds," "straddles," and so forth.

Howard Smith, equally accommodating, told the innocent colonel all about the value of different hands, how a royal flush beat everything, four of a kind came next, and how the value of hands went down through fulls, flushes, threes, straights, pairs, and so forth, down to the lowest possible combinations.

Frank Noble told him all about bluffing, and tried to give him an idea of the average value of a hand, while Courtland advised him of the difference between hands as first drawn, and after modification.

When they were all through, the colonel turned to Crooke, and observed:

"And you, sare, can you not tell me a leetle of dis great game; how it is played?"

Crooke had not said a word during the lectures, but sat gloomily looking at the table, drumming with his fingers.

He frowned at the colonel's question.

"No, I can't. I play my game. I don't give away points on it."

"You are right, sare," observed the colonel, blandly. "I will watch, and say no more."

Crooke flashed a glance over him.

"Watch away. Come, boys, I've a little engagement with a lady to-night. Hurry up with the deal. I can't play after twelve."

Then they cut for deal, and the game began, Courtland giving the cards.

Several hands were played, and no high bets had yet been made, the players winning or losing with equanimity.

The colonel had lighted a cigar, and was placidly smoking, while he regarded the gamblers with a sleepy glance.

When the deal came round to Crooke, the veteran got up and went back to a sideboard, on which still reposed various implements of table cutlery, and some bottles of wine, with an open box of cigars.

At the back of this sideboard, a little above Crooke's chair, was a looking glass, and the colonel could see the gambler's cards as he dealt them.

Colonel Plunger threw the cigar he had been smoking out of the back window, saying:

"Dem cigar do not draw."

Then he lighted another, looking in the glass all the time, and puffing loudly, as if the second cigar were equally hard to draw with the other.

His second glance revealed Crooke's hand, and the colonel saw he had six cards, one of them the king of hearts.

The next moment the colonel saw the king of hearts disappear up Crooke's sleeve, while the rest of the gambler's hand consisted of three fives, a deuce, and the queen of clubs.

The colonel strolled back to his place, and blew a cloud of smoke over the table, while he glanced over Frank Noble's cards which were beside him.

Frank had three nines, the queen of hearts, and jack of diamonds, and he put in a chip.

Kettleton, Courtland and Smith successively raised the bets, and it came to Crooke, who said quietly:

"I guess I raise this pile a thousand dollars. It's time we had a little fun."

The colonel drew in another volume of smoke, and heard Frank say:

"I'll see it, and raise it ten."

"Then I'm out," quoth Kettleton, dryly, "a pair of aces don't warrant so much."

And he dropped his cards face up, while Courtland, who was next, after some hesitation, threw up his cards, and Smith followed suit.

"Well," asked Frank, seeing that Crooke was his only opponent, "what do you do?"

The Boss Better laid down his cards, the colonel watching him through the smoke, and said quietly:

"I'll call you."

As he spoke he pushed a bundle of blue chips into the pool, and Frank imitated his example.

"Well what have you got?" asked Crooke.

"Three nines."

"They're good."

And the Boss Better gathered up the hands, shuffled the cards and passed them over to Courtland, while Frank said:

"I thought you were bluffing, old fellow. I wonder what you had now?"

Crooke sneered.

"It cost me ten thousand to find out your hand. I guess you'll have to pay to look into mine. Deal the cards; money talks."

Frank flushed slightly as he went on dealing, and retorted:

"Yes, money talks. I hope you're prepared to do a little of it to night."

"I've lost the sixty thousand I won from you to-day," sneered Crooke. "I'll give you a chance to say double or quits."

"You can bet your life it won't be double," said Frank sharply. "I'm not a baby at poker, I can tell you. I may make you double, if you don't beg."

Crooke flashed an evil glance at him, but said no more, and the colonel saw that under the mask of civility used by all at the table, the passion of gambling was beginning to work, and that Crooke was angry at his loss and determined to get it back.

The next hand Frank drew a pair of sevens, the queen of hearts, king and jack of clubs, and went into the pool, drawing three cards to fill.

He received a pair of queens, and the colonel glancing through the smoke, saw another card disappear up Crooke's sleeve.

The betting on this hand resulted in favor of the young man again, but the bet was only a thousand dollars, and again it was Crooke who lost it.

He paid it with a smile, seeming to have completely recovered his temper, and pushed his cards over to Courtland so as to conceal the fact that he had only kept four.

Courtland dealt the third hand, and this time the colonel rose as if to stretch his limbs and leaned against the back of his chair, as if to survey the room, but in reality to command a

view of the mirror on the sideboard, in which was reflected the whole of Crooke's hand.

It consisted of two small pair and the queen of hearts, nevertheless Crooke took another card and bet another thousand dollars on this slender capital.

As before he lost this time to Kettleton, who had the best hand, and exclaimed pettishly:

"I'm out of luck to-night. You boys are just skinning me alive."

But as he shoved over his cards to the next player, Colonel Plunger again noticed that there were only four.

A third card had gone up the gambler's sleeve, and the observer felt his heart beating violently.

He said nothing till the turn came to Crooke for the deal, and then he got up and coughed violently, saying:

"Ah, dis smoke dry me all up. I must take von glass wine. Dis is stupide game, dis pokaire. I cannot understand it."

Crooke looked up and laughed.

"Oh, we'll teach it you, all in good time, monsieur. Sit down and take a hand."

"No, I thank you, sare," was the polite reply. "My monee in my pocket it is safe. On de-table—pouf!—it go like smoke."

And he stalked to the sideboard to get a glass of wine while Crooke dealt. He saw the gambler take up his cards. There were three clubs, and the nine and ten of hearts in his hand which Crooke at once laid down.

"How many do you want?" he asked Frank.

"Oh, I think I can stand a card," was the answer, and Crooke dealt it to him. Kettleton staid out and Howard Smith took three cards, Courtland being contented with a pair.

"I take three cards," said Crooke, and the colonel saw him draw them and take them up. They were the Jack of spades, queen of diamonds and eight of hearts.

The looker-on in the glass saw Crooke put them into his lap, and a moment later he laid his cards on the table and re-ted his left hand flat on the cloth in another place.

Then he said to Courtland:

"Well, what are you doing?"

"I'm chipping a thousand," said the young man, turning a little pale, but pushing out his stake with coolness.

"And I'm raising it ten," said Kettleton, in the same way.

"Very good, gentlemen," said Howard Smith, with a tone of exultation he could not conceal. "I'll see that and go twenty better. Here's my due-bill."

And he wrote hastily on a card and laid it in the pool.

"That being the case," said Crooke, quietly, "it only remains for me to see the thirty and go twenty better. Here she goes, in good greenbacks."

As he spoke he threw a roll of money on the table and went on, smilingly:

"Come, Frank, now's your chance. Double or quits, if you dare!"

"Oh, I'll see it!" said Frank, hotly. "I'll see it all the time. You can't bluff me, Mr. Crooke. It costs fifty thousand to come in, does it?"

"That is the precise state of the game, my Christian friend," said Crooke, with a sneer. "Does it flutter your nerves at all?"

The colonel had turned from the sideboard and was watching him intently.

The gambler's large hand lay spread out on the table, and he had not touched his cards at all.

Quietly the colonel reached back on the sideboard, never removing his eyes from that large fat hand, and picked up a large steel carving fork, with which, up his sleeve, he made a step toward Crooke, whose eyes were fixed menacingly on those of Frank Noble.

Frank had turned very pale at last. The magnitude of the betting was enough to appall the most reckless.

Already Howard Smith was trembling and fingering at his cards, ready to throw them up.

Kettleton's face had fallen to an expression of pitiable dismay and Courtland had thrown up a full hand, reckless of who saw it.

The men who remained in must have something to beat a full hand.

"I see the fifty thousand, and I go thirty thousand better," said Frank, firmly. "Here is my due-bill, eighty thousand dollars."

"I see it and call you," responded Crooke. "I never give due-bills. If I lose I pay. What have you got?"

Frank smiled with an air of relief.

"I've four kings and an ace. Are they good?"

"They're NOT!" was the answer, with a snap of the teeth. "I've a royal flush in hearts. Is it good?"

"If I see it, yes. Here are my kings. Now for your royal flush."

He spread out his hand on the table, and Crooke was just about to withdraw his own palm from the cloth when the colonel leaned over the table, and, with one mighty stab of the big carving fork, nailed the gambler's hand to the board, producing immediate confusion.

Crooke uttered a shriek of irrepressible pain and stared up at the other as if he had seen a

ghost, the young men started up, all aghast, and the colonel said, coolly:

"Sir, if the queen and Jack of hearts are not under your hand, I beg your pardon."

CHAPTER XX.

THE LETTER.

Or all the men in the dining room, the colonel alone retained perfect coolness, as he repeated in the same matter-of-fact way:

"If the queen and Jack of hearts are not under your hand, I beg your pardon."

Then, with a quick motion of his hand, he tossed Crooke's cards over, showing the eight, nine and ten of hearts, ace of clubs and five of diamonds.

"Where's your royal flush?" he continued his accent having wholly disappeared. "This pool belongs to Mr. Noble, and you know it. Crooke, after his first irrepressible scream of agony, remained glaring up into the stern, merciless face of the other like a demon in torture, but his right hand was going back to his pistol pocket and the colonel saw it.

In a moment he plucked out the fork from the hand it impaled, threw the very cards he had indicated, face up on the table, smeared with blood but still to be plainly recognized, and went on:

"Fire if you dare! Gentlemen, take his pistol from him, if you want to save his life."

In a moment Howard Smith and young Kettleton had grasped the gambler's arm, and he relinquished his design, saying, in a low hoarse tone:

"Take the stakes. I was only bluffing. He put those cards there."

There was a dead silence in the room, in the midst of which Frank Noble gathered in the chips and money on the table, tore up the due-bill Howard Smith had signed, and said in a low voice:

"This is not a fair hand, gentlemen. The cards could not have been dealt fairly. Mr. Crooke, take your money and go. I am sorry this has happened. For my part it has taught me a lesson. I play no more poker."

His friends stared at him in surprise. A look of deep sadness was on the young man's face, and he looked at Crooke as if he positively pitied him, as he pushed the Boss Better's money toward him. But Crooke, who had drawn out his handkerchief to tie round his wounded hand, shook his head with a scowl.

"It was a fair deal, and any man who says I stacked the cards, lies. The money is yours. I'm no baby to cry over my losses. As for this man, who has come in here to play the bully, I'll be even with him for his cowardly assault when my hand is well again. He's tried to make me out a cheat, but I swear before Heaven no card was under my hand. I was bluffing and lost; that's all."

The colonel had not said a word after his startling outburst, but had stood apart with folded arms.

Now he interrupted quietly:

"Perhaps de gentleman may be right, but de cards I mention was under his hand, or how did dey come bloody?"

"How do I know you didn't put them there to spite me?" asked Crooke sullenly.

The colonel laughed.

"Vell, ve vill let it go at dat, but I am sure you vill see de propriety of stopping dis game and going home. You came to shear de lamb, mon ami, you go home shorn. T'ens, you have in your pocket leetle checque of Monsieur Noble. You gif dat checque and take your monee. Den you vill be even. I do not vant to stop dat checque in de morning. Is dat satisfactory, Monsieur Noble?"

Frank bowed without speaking, and the discomfited gambler drew out of his pocket-book and handed over the cheque that he had won that very day on the race, gathering up his money at the same time. As he counted it he hesitated, and said:

"I owe you ten thousand yet. I won sixty, and lost seventy. Here it is. If you refuse to take it, you stigmatize my innocent mistake as a crime. Do you wish to do that?"

"No," said Frank, in a low voice. "I do not wish to be hard. I give you the benefit of the doubt. At the same time we play no more cards together. I'll give you your revenge on the course if you like, but we play no more poker together."

Crooke nodded sullenly and put away his money. Then he went to the door, turned and said to Colonel Plunger, in a tone of intense malignity:

"I'll have your heart's blood for this."

The colonel smiled, but deigned no reply, and the gambler went forth.

Then the young men stared at each other uneasily, and Kettleton observed:

"Lucky no waiters were in here. We must hush up this affair and pay for the cloth. It's all stained with blood."

"Pardon, sare, but dat is my affair," said the colonel, quietly. "It is a payment on which I insist. I spoil de cloth and I am willing to pay for vat I do ten times over for de sake of vat I learn to-night."

Then he called in the waiter and paid, as he

had announced his intention of doing, after which he observed quietly:

"I have an apology to make to you all as gentlemen."

"For what?" asked Howard Smith.

"I have deceive you, sare, and make you all t'ink I know not'ing of pokaire. As a mattaire of fact I have play it in de years past in California. I have to offer you all little piece of advice. Do not play de pokaire vidout de limit in de future. It spoil de game. De sci nee do not rule. It become a question of de long purse. I see Monsieur Kettleton and de rest dey can not afford to stake fifty t'ousand, yet dey near lee lose it, and it become a struggle between our friend Noble and de-de mar who just go away. Messieurs, I see his hand. I see he lose de money to you to draw you on. I see him slip de card up his sleeve. Den he deal. He give Monsieur Noble de kings, Monsieur Courtland de full hand, de oder gentleman de four of a kind. Den I know his game to fill his royal flush in hearts. I see he have de card under his hand. If he lift dat hand one cannot prove dat he cheat. I take de responsibilite. I prove de fraud. Now, messieurs, I take my leave. Bon soir."

He was leaving the room when Frank Noble said hastily:

"Don't go yet, colonel. I'll go with you. I want you to hear something I have to say, in presence of these gentlemen."

The colonel paused, and Frank continued:

"Boys, you must not take it il, but I've made up my mind. I play no more poker. But for the colonel's prompt action to-night I should have been a loser of eighty thousand dollars, besides what I lost at the races, and even my grandfather's fortune cannot stand such losses. In this room, twenty years ago, my uncle was ruined. In this room I swear to you all that I play no more. Now good-night. Colonel, I'm ready."

The party broke up soberly, and Frank walked away with the colonel, across the square, with its glare of electric lights, toward the hotel.

Both men were silent and thoughtful on the way, till Frank burst out:

"Colonel, it is a very strange thing, this?"

"What, my friend?"

"This trick of Crooke's."

"All tricks are strange, my friend. If all de world knew dem, dey would not succeed."

"But I don't mean that."

"Indeed?"

"No, I mean this particular trick."

"In what way?"

"Well, do you know—"

"What, my friend?"

"That is very same trick which my uncle Paul asserted was played by Lester twenty years ago, in that very room."

"Indeed?"

"Actually."

The colonel made no answer and they walked on to the hotel before Frank spoke again. Then he took the colonel into his room, offered him cigars and they sat down and smoked silently for some minutes before the young man again said:

"It was the very same trick." I wonder if it can possibly be the same man? You said at dinner, that you had seen one Sharply in California, who exactly resembled this man and had a scar on his face. Did you mean that?"

"I did."

"Do you think this Sharply was Lester?"

"Dat is not for me to say. Did you ever hear Lester fully described?"

Frank got up, went to the door, closed and locked it before he answered, and then came back and sat down.

He seemed to have something on his mind, and his companion left him alone.

Presently Frank said:

"Colonel, I'm going to tell you something. You say you knew my father?"

"He was my dearest friend, my boy."

"Then you must have known my uncle also, for he and my father were close allies."

The colonel nodded his head slowly.

"I did t'ink I knew him. I saw him often twenty years ago."

"Did you ever hear of his trouble at the club in those days?"

"I did."

"Did you also know this Lester?"

"I did."

"Are you certain that the man Sharply you said in California was the same?"

The colonel hesitated for the first time.

"I cannot be certain of anyt'ing. He was de same in face and figure and he had de same scar your uncle gave him."

"How was that scar given? With a knife?"

The colonel started.

"Vid a knife? No, no. Your uncle was a bad, bad man, very bad man, but not so bad as dat. He struck Lestaire a blow vid de right hand and dat make de cut."

"With his knuckles alone?"

"Yes, sare, so I hear from your fader."

"Well, colonel, now to tell you what I said I was going to do. My father, before his death, left a paper to be given to me and the scene of

to-night has brought it up forcibly to my mind, though I've never thought of it before."

The colonel looked surprised.

"A paper? What paper?"

"A letter to me, to be read in a certain contingency which has come to pass."

"A contingency?"

"Yes. I'll show you the letter."

He went to a bureau and brought out a large letter with an old faded envelope and showed the colonel the outside:

It was superscribed:

"To be delivered to my son, if he inherits the property of his grandfather Malcolm. To be destroyed by him unread, if his grandfather leaves his property to others."

The colonel looked at it gravely, and said:

"Proceed, sэр, if you t'ink right to trust your familee secrets to a stranger."

"I don't consider you a stranger, and it is no secret of which I have need to be ashamed, colonel. This letter proves my father to have been a man of honor and generosity not often found in the world."

The colonel nodded his head slowly.

"Sare, I know dat already."

Frank opened the letter and read it aloud:

"My DEAR SON:—

"The superscription of this letter needs explanation. I have reason to believe that your grandfather Malcolm, while a bitter and avaricious man, is an honest one. He was very angry at my marrying his only daughter and will not help you during my life; but, as I am going away to the plains now on dangerous duty, and may very likely never return alive, I desire to leave this record behind me in the hands of your mother, who fully agrees with me in the sentiments expressed herein."

"Your grandfather had two children: a son, Paul, and a daughter, Pauline. In the event of his death, intestate, by the just laws of our country, these children will share alike, and one of them is your mother. Owing to misfortunes, your uncle Paul fell under the displeasure of his father, in a matter which induced the elder Malcolm to think him a dishonest, ungrateful son. I know that he was neither, but the victim of an unscrupulous villain of the name of Lester. In consequence of his father's anger, your uncle Paul left this country and is said to have been killed in Mexico, but I have reason to believe that he left some legal representatives behind him. My object in writing this letter is to implore you, in case, after my death and that of your mother, your grandfather should relent toward you and make you his sole heir, to remember that your uncle Paul has a right to his share of the property and that his children, if he leave any have a right to his share."

"I know well that this paper has no legal force to bind you, but I trust that my son will be too honorable to defraud an unfortunate relative of his rights and I feel sure that his mother will teach him to respect the rules which guide my conduct."

"I charge him, therefore, in the event of his succeeding to his grandfather's property to keep in-viate his uncle's share and use his best endeavors to find his uncle if he be living or his heirs, if he be dead, and to turn over to him or them the share that would by right have been theirs had the elder Malcolm died intestate."

"And this I charge on my son as my last wish on earth."

FRANCIS NOBLE,

"Captain U. S. A."

The colonel listened to this letter silently, and when it was concluded remarked:

"It is a good lettaire, sare, and vat I should expect from your fader. But vat is it to me?"

"Simply this," said Frank, earnestly. "Do you who seem to know so much, know if my uncle be alive?"

The colonel smoked silently for a few moments and then said:

"Your uncle is dead, and has left no heirs. The fortune is yours to dispose of. It will never be claimed of you."

CHAPTER XXI.

MISS O'RAFFERTY.

MISS KATIE O'RAFFERTY was stitching away at her sewing machine in Rivington street the morning after the races, looking decidedly out of temper.

Her lips were compressed and she was muttering to herself at intervals what sounded very like good old-fashioned grumbling:

"I'm not going to stay here and be made a fool of forever," quoth Katie to herself as she stitched away, "take all Mrs. MacCarty's scolding and know it's not my fault. A pretty trick for one that calls herself a respectable woman to stay out all night in this way, disappointing her customers and leaving me to bear the brunt of it. I can cut out a dress and fit as well as Miss Mary Madden herself and I'll set up for myself; that's what I will. May be if I was primped up with falsehood and deceit the way she is, I mightn't look so bad. False frizzles and false teeth don't count. I've got my own hair and teeth, I'm thankful to say."

And that morning Katie, the drudge, had actually made herself neat and tidy with a very pleasing effect, for she was really a pretty girl and there was no sham about her charms.

It was past eleven o'clock, and Miss Madden had not come home, so that Katie had a right to feel aggrieved. Nevertheless, when the door-bell rung and she looked out to see Miss Madden standing on the steps, Katie's indignation turned into faint hearted tremors, and it was in the meekest way that she went down and opened the door.

"Well," began her principal, fretfully, as soon as she entered the house, "I thought you were going to keep me all day waiting. Who's been here?"

"Mrs. MacCarty," answered Kate, as she followed Mary up-stairs, "and she says she will take her custom away if that dress is not finished to-night."

"She can take all she wants," replied the dressmaker, throwing herself on a sofa with an air of scorn. "Thank Heaven, I've no need to wait on the likes of her any more. I'm going to give up the business, Katie, and you're welcome to all you can make out of it."

Katie stared, hardly able to credit her ears.

"Do you really mean it?" she asked.

"I really mean it. I've only come home to pack up. What do you think happened to me last night, Katie?"

"I'm sure I don't know," quoth Katie. "You didn't get married, did you?"

"Why who could have told you?"

"No one. What is it true?"

"I really did."

"Get married?"

"Yes, last night, Katie, to the handsomest man you ever laid your two eyes on, and as rich as a Jew."

"Not the gentleman who was here yesterday?"

"The very same, Katie. And he's going to give me the handsomest pair of diamond earrings you ever saw, girl. What do I care for Mrs. MacCarty now? That for Mrs. MacCarty."

At that very moment came a sharp pull at the door-bell, and Katie exclaimed:

"Oh, dear, maybe that's herself."

"Send her right up, then," said Mary, in a sharp tone. "May as well have it out now as any time."

And she threw off her bonnet and went to the glass to look at herself, while Katie went down to the door.

Mary was well satisfied with the picture in the mirror, for she had never looked better in her life, and there was an expression of triumphant glee in her face as she turned again to the door, expecting to greet Mrs. MacCarty and enjoy the feminine luxury of "giving a piece of her mind" to the haughty MacCarty wife of the corner grocer, who was also a local politician, when into the door walked—not Mrs. MacCarty, but Billy Boots, in his usual rather dandified dress, and stood looking at her in a singular way.

Mary showed considerable tact in this unexpected emergency. Another woman would have tried to be flippant, insulting or abjectly terrified.

Mary Madden simply came forward to Billy with her most charming smile, and said, as she held out her hand:

"Good-morning. Why, I thought you would be too busy to come over and see me to-day."

Billy kept his hands behind him and said quietly:

"Thankee, Miss Mary. I came over to see you, and Katie's jest be'n a-tellin' me on the way up-stairs—"

Mary turned on Katie with a stamp.

"How dare you interfere?"

"Why, Lord bless me, I didn't think 'twas a secret!" cried Katie. "You told me and seemed proud of it—"

"And so I am," retorted Mary, "but it's none of your business, is it? Go up-stairs and leave me to attend to my own affairs."

"Well, I'm sure," was all of Katie's reply, and she burst into ostentatious tears, for the benefit of the young man beside her, and went sobbing away.

Then Mary said sharply:

"Yes, it's true. I was married last night, but that needn't hinder us being as good friends as ever, Charley. I was too old for you anyhow. You know Colonel Plunger said so, and he was so pressing I couldn't refuse him. Sit down and let's talk it over quietly."

She spread out her skirts over the sofa, and motioned him to a chair. He did not accept the offer, but remained standing, and said slowly:

"There ain't much to say, Miss Mary. May I ax who's married ye?"

"Why Colonel Plunger, of course."

"Are you sure, miss?"

"Am I sure? Of course. Do you think I don't know my own husband?"

"Very good, miss; but are you sure his name is Plunger?"

Mary started.

"What do you mean? Why of course I'm sure. Didn't we both sign the book in the justice's office?"

Billy nodded and went on.

"I ax parding, miss, but may I ax what kind of looking man he is?"

Mary started again and looked at him earnestly.

"Why, I do believe the boy don't think I'm married?" she said scornfully. "Look here, Mr. Smarty, will that open your eyes?"

And she pulled out and exhibited proudly her marriage certificate, signed in a bold hand:

"WILLIAM ALLEN COOKE,

"Justice of the Peace."

Billy looked at it closely and said:

"I see it's all regular, miss, but I'd like to ax if you're sure your husband give the right name; that's all."

"Of course he did. See here, Charley Wandle, I want you to be careful how you talk of my husband. He'll be here in ten minutes to fetch me away, and if I tell him you've insulted me, he'll just crush you into small pieces, you little wiflet, you."

Charley Wandle nodded, with the same imperturbable gravity he had shown all through, and answered:

"Very good, miss, then I'll be glad to see him for I don't believe it's my Colonel Plunger at all. If it's the man I seen you sittin' with on the Grand Stand he ain't the colonel. His name's Crooke, and they call him the Boss Better on the track—"

"I don't care what his name is," she retorted recklessly. "He's my husband and these lines will hold him. If he goes to the races for a living, at least he makes a good one out of it, and he can dress me in silks and velvets and give me diamond earrings, which is more than you can do. So there!"

The boy looked at her quietly.

"Then all you said to me yesterday was jest to fool me, was it, Mary? You'd got it all made up to marry that man?"

"Well, yes, if you want to know, yes. Now what are you going to do about it?"

"Nothen to you, Mary."

"Nothing to me?"

"No, Mary, nothen. I can't forget I used to love ye. God forgive ye fur what you've done to one as loved ye true."

His voice faltered slightly, and she made a pettish movement.

"What's the good of grieving? I was too old for you. You can't expect a woman to wait forever for a boy, and throw away such an elegant chance as I had."

"No, I can't. I wouldn't ha' said nothen ag'in it, only fur the way you did it. That's what cuts, Mary. Why did you ax me to lose that race if ye meant to marry him?"

"Because—because—oh, because."

"That means because ye was set on acting mean, don't it?"

"As you please. I can stand a good deal from you, Billy, because I fooled you so nicely, but don't go too far or it may be worse for you when my husband comes."

"Is the gentleman a-comin' soon?" asked Billy, in a low tone, with a peculiar gleam of his eyes.

"Yes. Hark! There's the carriage now. He'll be here in a minute. You'd better not let him catch you, or he'll give you such a bating you'll wish you'd never seen him."

Billy walked to the window and looked out. A hack was indeed at the door, and Crooke, the Boss Better, was just getting out, but Billy noticed that he wore one arm in a sling as he came up the steps to the house. The boy took his seat, turning white as he did it, but setting his teeth firmly.

Mary Madden, in her turn, grew a little frightened and cried out:

"Run away, Charley, for heaven's sake. I don't want to see you hurt after I've treated you so badly."

"I won't be hurt," returned the boy, obstinately, and as he spoke he leaned back in his chair, with his hands in his pockets, his eyes fixed on the door.

Presently the heavy tread of Crooke was heard on the stairs and the Boss Better entered the room, saying roughly:

"Come, come, Mary, I can't wait all day. I thought I'd find you ready packed. Hallo! who's this?"

As he spoke, he scowled at Billy whom he did not recognize at first.

Mary, looking scared, interposed.

"It's only little Charley Wandle, my love, who's feeling angry at me, but don't be hard on him, for my sake."

Crooke laughed more good-humoredly.

"Oh, it's Billy Boots, is it? Hard on him? Oh no, I couldn't do that you know. It would be rubbing it in; hey, Billy. I don't want to hurt him. But look here, Billy, my boy. My wife promised you a thousand dollars for throwing that race. Here it is. I don't want to cheat you. But hark ye, if you know which side your bread is buttered on, you'll leave that Noble and Plunger crowd and stick to me. I may be crooked on the course, but I'm all straight to my friends. Here; take the money and say no more about it."

CHAPTER XXII.

KATIE'S LITTLE GAME.

For a moment Billy Boots felt inclined to refuse the offer and dare the gambler's vengeance. He had come there wound up to pitch of desperation that rendered him restless, and was fingering a cocked pistol in his pocket, at the moment Crooke entered the room, resolved to shoot him if he offered the least insult.

The coaxing tone of the gambler and the

sight of the *bona fide* roll of hundred-dollar bills offered him, showed him that something else was needed of him by the Boss Better, and made him hesitate.

"Take the money, you won it fairly," said Crooke, heartily. "I know well enough the mare was the better horse. But any fool can win a race on the best horse. It takes a jockey to lose by a neck and no one to know he's pulling. Besides, I want you to do some more for me."

"I thought so," observed Billy, quietly, as he tucked away the notes in his pocket. "What is it, boss?"

"You're to ride Ambition next week in the four-mile race, are you not?"

"Yes, boss. Am I to pull him?"

"No; I don't want you to do any such thing. All I want is that he should win the lead and keep it as long as he can. Give him all the whip and spur he needs and force the pace from the very start."

"How much for that?" asked Billy, dryly. "You've taken my gal, and you ought to pay high."

"Good joke, good joke. You're right. Well, Billy, I'll make it two thousand if you'll run Ambition down in the third mile. Beat all the time on record for a mile, two and three, but let some other horse take the last mile."

Billy nodded meaningly.

"All right, boss, I understand the racket. All you've got to do is to come down with the stamps and you'll find me there. Half down, and half more when the job's done."

"You shall have it, Billy," said the gambler, who seemed to be in a remarkably conciliating mood that day. "I'll give you a thousand the night before the race, and the rest the day he comes in second or third in the four-mile stakes."

"I'm agreeable, boss," replied Billy, shortly. "But we don't want no more fixin' of hosses, like you tried on Fanny Flyaway. I ain't in on any sich racket."

Crooke affected surprise and anger.

"You don't imagine I was into that scrape, do you, Billy? I heard of that attempt, and all I can say is that I was glad to hear from Burton that it failed, though he was not there as he ought to have been."

Billy grinned rather scornfully.

"The feller that tried it on has a mark that he'll remember," he observed. "I guess he won't try it on again till his shoulder gits well. We're goin' to have shot-guns next time instead of pistols. Well, boss, there ain't nothin' more for me to do hereabouts. I reckon. I come to see Miss Mary there, but since she ain't Miss Mary no longer, I ain't sich a fool as to hanker arter other men's wives. Good-day, sir."

"Good day, Billy," returned the gambler, cordially. "Remember, if you stick to our side you'll come out right in the end. I don't go back on my friends."

"All right, sir," returned Billy.

Then he turned to Mary, and his face worked slightly with an emotion he could not conceal, as he said:

"Good by, Miss Mary."

"Good-by, Charley," she said, softly. "You won't keep any bad feeling, will you?"

"Against you? No," he answered, and then he left the room quietly and went down-stairs to the door, unaccompanied. It was a change to Billy, who had been courted before that day, and was used to innumerable tender adieux behind the street door; but no one seemed to care for him now, and he heard a whisper near him, and Katie, the sewing-girl came up to him and said hastily, in a low voice:

"You poor dear young man, there's them as will be true to ye, if you only knew them. I could tell you a lot if you'd meet me somewhere."

"All right," returned Billy, in the same tone. "Say the word when."

"Meet me to-night at eight o'clock, in the Atlantic Garden," whispered Katie, rapidly. "I'll tell you something you'll want to hear."

"I'll be there," whispered Billy, and then he hardly knew how it came about in the dark, but he kissed Katie, and she kissed him, when he went out into the street and departed, while Katie returned up-stairs, as meek and quiet as possible, and Mary Madden never suspected how she had been occupied, as the dressmaker set to work to pack up her wearing apparel to move away from the house.

For Mary Madden was fairly intoxicated at the idea of having been married, no matter how secretly and suddenly, to a distinguished-looking gentleman who boarded at a first-class hotel and sported so many diamonds, while Crooke, who saw in the girl a ready and quick-witted instrument that might aid him in his purposes, had really married her the night before, after his return from the club, and was meditating, with her assistance, a plan by which he hoped to retrieve his own discomfiture and overthrow his foes.

An hour later there, when the frate Mrs. MacCarty arrived at the door of the little establishment in Rivington street, ready to overwhelm Miss Madden with just indignation, she was met by the sight of Miss Katie O'Rafferty taking down the sign, conversing with a young man, whose paint-spotted overalls announced his trade, and to whom she was saying:

"I want it put in the best style, Mr. Sweet, and I don't mind if it costs three dollars. 'Mamzelle O'Rafferty, from Paris, Modist.' That's all. I don't want to carry on shirt-making. It don't pay."

"And what's the matter wid Miss Madden, at all?" demanded Mrs. MacCarty, as she heard the last remark.

Katie smiled sweetly in the face of the grocery queen, and replied:

"Miss Madden's gone out of the trade, Mrs. MacCarty, and left me the fixtures and good-will."

"Sorra much good-will is there to leave," returned Mrs. MacCarty, sternly. "When will my dress be done, Katie?"

"Miss O'Rafferty, if ye please," said Katie, with a toss of her head; "I'm b'ad of the business now, ye'll mind, and I'll have the dress, done on Friday. If that's too late, ye're welcome to take it elsewhere, if ye pay me for the day's work that's on it already."

"And sure and ye promised it to-morrow," cried Mrs. MacCarty, angrily. "What's yer word worth anyhow?"

"When I said to-morrow, Miss Madden's name was up here," returned Katie, in the calmest of tones. "Now I promise for myself and I'll keep me word."

And as Mrs. MacCarty knew that the girl was a skillful fitter and that good dressmakers were scarce in the neighborhood, she was forced to take out her displeasure in grumbling and take herself away, while Katie went out to hunt up assistants to carry on the business.

But that evening, at half-past seven, Miss Katie left the business to take care of itself, although evening visitors were likely to be plentiful with orders, for she locked up the house, leaving it dark and signless, while she sallied forth to the Atlantic Garden to keep her appointment with Billy.

Katie's taste in dress and her means for indulging it, were not equal to those of her former principal, but she had one advantage over her, which she made the most of.

Katie was not yet eighteen, had a fine natural figure, a pretty face, jet-black hair, even white teeth and real Irish gray eyes "laid in wid a dirty finger" according to a Milesian proverb:—that is to say furnished with long dark lashes of extreme beauty.

And all of Katie's savings for years had gone into a single dress which looked well under the Bowery gaslight.

To be sure it was only cotton velvet, but the effect is just as good at night as the most expensive silk velvet, and Katie had it made up stylishly, with a short cape of imitation jet bugles and beads, and some showy dollar jewelry which glittered in the gaslight as well as if it had cost a fortune.

When she arrived in the Bowery and strolled slowly past the Atlantic Garden all alone, she began to feel frightened, for there were plenty of loungers there who stared at her curiously; but there is one thing to say in favor of the Bowery lounger. He is not as much of a ruffian as his brother of Broadway, and rarely, if ever, insults a woman.

So that Katie had no offers of escort to frighten her, till she saw the small dapper figure of the jockey approaching, dressed in a new sporting suit, with a new and glittering watch chain depending over his white vest.

She at once went up to him and took his arm, saying:

"I thought you'd never come, Billy, and I was frightened to death at these rude men."

"Did any of 'em insult ye?" asked Billy, and as he spoke he looked round him menac-

ingly, with his hand on his hip, at which Katie said hastily:

"Oh, mercy, no. What a temper you've got. I declare I'm quite afraid of you, myself."

"You needn't be," returned Billy, in a lordly tone; "I ain't big, but I'm able to take keer of any lady as trusts herself to my purtection, if she don't go back on me."

"I wouldn't go back on ye, Billy, dear," was the answer, spoken in a tone of tenderness, and then they went into the great glass roofed hall, and proceeded to the elevated stage at the end, where they could command a view of all that passed in the hall below while the tables near them were not yet full.

The orchestra was playing airs from Strauss and Offenbach, the hall was full of smoke and beer glasses, while the birds in their cages under the chandeliers were singing away as hard as they could pipe in an effort to overtop the loud buzz of conversation in the hall.

Billy Boots was not unmindful of his duty to his fair guest, and ordered a bottle of the most expensive Rhine wine he could find on the list, answering when Katie gently remonstrated at the extravagance:

"Never mind, Miss Katie, I've got heaps of money to spend now, and I don't care how soon it's spent. I don't care for nothin' no more."

"Why not, Billy? I'm sure sich a nice young man as you ought not to talk that way."

Billy affected a tone of lofty cynicism.

"It's all very well. I ain't sayin' it ain't. But I don't keer how soon I'm laid in the cold ground, I don't. I've be'n a good boy till today. Now I'm goin' to be a bad one, just to see how it feels."

Katie gave him a tap as she answered:

"You always was a bad boy, I believe, but I wouldn't take on so jest because Mary Madden give you the sack. You don't know what I know about her."

Billy looked at the girl rather sullenly. He had taken three glasses of wine already, in rapid succession, and felt still more reckless than when he had come in; but the idea of hearing something against the girl he had adored grated on him yet.

"I don't want to hear nothin' 'bout her," retorted, "if it's ag'in' her. She treated n' bad, bad as kin be; but I love her s' ill, and I'd go through fire and water fur her. I ain't false, if she is."

Katie bit her lip. She had come out that evening bent on taking Billy's heart captive on the rebound, and his sudden access of fidelity to the woman he had lost piqued and puzzled her.

"False you may say," she answered sharply. "There ain't nothin' 'bout her hard y that ain't false, only you don't know her us 'co. You ain't lived in the house with her, and seen her a-dressin'!"

"I should hope not," replied Billy, with a blush. "I ain't used to goin' into ladies' bedrooms, I ain't."

This made Katie blush and slap him.

"Go along with you. A'n't you 'bamed to talk so? I didn't mean any sich thing."

"Then what did you mean?" asked Billy. "You said you had suthin' to tell me 'bout Mary. What is it?"

For the boy was in no wise taken with Katie, such is the mysterious influence of affinities in love.

Mary Madden had been small, slender, blonde, quick, capricious, and a great flirt, with tiny feet and hands, and the darkest of brown eyes, with the whitest of blonde hair.

Katie was two inches taller than the boy himself, with the figure of a Venus, and good honest hands and feet, but she weighed at least one hundred and forty pounds, while Billy tipped the scale at ninety-five.

The very qualities which made him so valuable as a jockey rendered him an object of scorn to the fair sex in general, and disposed him to avoid them for fear of being treated as a boy, while he felt he was as much a man as any six-footer of them all.

Katie had a sort of glimmering of the truth as to his nature, and had n't watched the arts of her late principal in vain. She knew that Billy was likely to be worth money as a jockey, and like most girls who work for a living, Katie had a keen ambition to get married, so that she might work for herself and a husband.

The fact of Mary Madden's success had made her doubly eager, and she was quit determined now to win Billy for herself.

"Well," she said, with affected hesitation, "I don't know as I ought to say anything about her at all, and I'm sure I wouldn't if she hadn't treated us both so mean. I knew she didn't love you all the time; but you seemed so happy, I didn't like to dash you. But I knew very well that if you'd known all that was goin' on, you wouldn't have been so set on her, the nasty, deceitful creature."

Billy poured out another glass, and drained it, but said nothing, and Katie went on:

"I suppose you know how old she was?"

"Yes. She was twenty-one."

Katie tittered.

"Twenty-one, indeed! Lord bless your poor innocence, you don't know much about ladies' ages. I've seen the family Bible."

Billy started and looked at her.

"You have? How old is she, then?"

"She's twenty-eight last March; and that ain't the worst of it."

"What is the worst of it?"

"Sue ain't got a single front tooth of her own. I've seen her take 'em out and put 'em in water ever so many times."

Billy looked incredulous, and asked:

"Are you sure of that?"

Katie smiled triumphantly, and put her hand in her pocket.

"I thought you wouldn't believe me," she said; "but I found her old set up-stairs. She was so crazy to go off with that gamblin' feller she forgot 'em. Here they are, and one of her false frizzes too. You can see how much you lost with her, and whether there ain't as good fish in the sea as ever were caught."

And the remorseless Katie handed him a blonde false front and an old set of upper teeth, at which Billy stared as if hardly able to believe his eyes.

The artful Katie said nothing to make her triumph odious till he observed:

"Well, I'm glad I seen 'em. I ain't lost much, have I, Katie?"

Katie gave a scornful sniff.

"That's accordin' to how you likes ladies," she said, drily. "Some likes 'em made up, others likes 'em the way the Lord made 'em. I ain't made up myself, and I ain't puttin' on airs neither, but I'm faithful and true to them as is true to me."

And Miss O'Rafferty favored the jockey with a glance that spoke volumes, though it produced little effect on Billy, who was for the time in a state of general dissatisfaction and disgust at the female sex in general, which did not all w him to see charms in any. He drank another glass of wine, and looked down into the hall with a gaze that made everything dance to and fro, for Billy was not used to drinking, and the wine had gone to his head.

Nevertheless he was able to distinguish faces, and he soon perceived no less a person than Crooke, advancing to the platform on which they were sitting, with the fair and faithless Mary on his arm.

"Why, look!" he said, thickly; "there's the man himself a-comin' with her. By gosh, Katie! she don't look as if she was made up at all."

Indeed she did not, for Mary Madden was one of those little blonde women that will stand any amount of making up and show little of it.

Katie turned pale, but her gray eyes flashed as she observed:

"But she is, though. I only wish I had a square chance to expose her, I'd do it."

Billy shook his head and muttered:

"No, don't. I don't want to hurt her."

But his hand went into his side pocket as the gambler approached, and he began to play with his pistol in a manner that would have been dangerous for a sober man; for Billy had not given up the boyish idea that it was the proper thing for him to do to take vengeance on the man who had cut him out.

It was while in this frame of mind that Crooke and Mary came up to him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE KNOCKER OUT COMES UP TO TIME.

THERE was a marked difference in the behavior of this interesting couple as they greeted Billy and his charge.

Crooke, easy and patronizing, took in the girl's figure at a glance, and he said to himself: "Boy's consoling himself. Tidy girl too. Not as sharp as Mary, but, by Jove! she has a good figure."

Mary, on the other hand, looked daggers at Katie, and thought:

"She's been talking abou me. I wonder what she's told him?"

Then Crooke said, in his heartiest way:

"Upon my soul, Wandle, I'm glad to see you! Ah! you sly dog, it don't take long to console you. Pray introduce me."

And Billy shame-facedly obeyed, when Mary observed, with a spiteful giggle:

"Oh! I know Katie O'Rafferty very well. I hope you're both enjoying yourselves this evening, Mr. Wandle and Miss O'Rafferty?"

"Pretty well, thank you, ma'am," retorted Katie. "Of course, we couldn't be expected to get along so well at first, but we're trying to do our best. Mr. Wandle is splendid company. Don't you think so, ma'am?"

"Hum! yes. My husband thought we'd come in here, just for a change; but you were the last peop'e we expected to see."

"Shouldn't wonder, ma'am. I was just tellin' Mr. Wandle how much of a hurry you was in to-day in packin', and left some things behind you. I'm very glad I've seen you, because I'm able to give 'em to you. They ain't no use to me."

And wicked Katie barded over the false front and the teeth in an ostentatious manner, looking straight in the eye of her former employer, who returned the glance with a positive glare of fury, as she saw what was being given to her.

For one moment Mary Madden was ready to fly at Katie's eyes; but the next she was able to control herself and collect all her quick wits to conquer the other. The sight of the articles convinced her that Katie had been telling tales, and a look at Billy's face showed her that the boy wavered as to what to believe.

Then she said with a sweet smile:

"I'm sure I'm much obliged, Katie, for your kindness; but I don't need these things. The false front I only used once, about five years ago, when I had the typhoid fever and had my hair cut off, but it's all grown since, and I don't wear a mite of false hair now. Do I, Philip? You know, don't you?"

She turned on Crooke, who could hardly restrain his laughter, but answered:

"Certainly I know. Not a bit of it."

"I'm sure I'm very sorry," said Katie, with intensely sarcastic humil ty. "I thought it belonged to you, and the teeth too."

"The teeth?" asked Mary, innocently. "What teeth are you talking of?"

"Why, those, of course, that you left in the bureau drawer," was the spiteful reply.

"I? oh, no, Katie, you're mistaken. I've not come down to false teeth yet. Those belonged to my grandmother, who died at the age of seventy."

And Mary saw, from the face of Billy, that he believed every word she said, and the vain heart of the silly creature rejoiced, for she hated to give up a victim to her charms, however humble.

As for Crooke, he listened to it all with perfect good nature. He had an object now in keeping on good terms with the jockey, and trusted to seduce him from his duty by the charms of his wife, who had promised him to wind the boy round her finger again if she got any sort of a chance at him.

It was not true that they had entered the Atlantic Garden by chance. They had had a distinct object in doing so, though the meeting with Billy was unlooked for.

Now Crooke rapped on the table, saying:

"Come, come, no matter about all that frippery, hey, Wandle? We know what women are, don't we, my boy? Let's have a bottle of champagne, to give us a taste for the music. Mary, my dear, you know you like champagne, and Miss Katie here, I'm sure could take a glass. Twill brighten her eyes and make her show her teeth in the smile of beauty that delights us all. Here, waiter, a bottle of Roederer, quick, and four glasses. You may as well say two bottles. One is nothing among so many."

He gave his quick-witted wife a signal that she understood at once, to devote herself to Billy, while he set himself to work to fascinate Katie O'Rafferty, no very difficult task at any time, but doubly easy under the influence of champagne and music.

Before they had sat there ten minutes more, the astute gambler saw that Billy Boots, what with champagne and flattery, was completely oblivious of Katie, and was whispering away to Mary as if they had never had a moment's

disagreement, while Katie O'Rafferty was chattering all sorts of nonsense and "giving herself away" at every word.

When he saw that Billy, from the mixture of champagne and Rhine wine, was quite drunk and inclined to sleep, while Katie was fit for any sort of prank, the gambler whispered to her:

"I say, wouldn't it be fun for you and me to steal off and leave these two together? How surprised they'd be when they found us gone."

Katie's eyes sparkled.

"It would serve them just right. I say, you're quite a nice fellow if you are married."

Crooke laughed, gave his wife a signal, and saw her turn her back to them, as he took Katie away, the girl clinging to his arm and saying:

"Oh, my! how funny I feel! The lights are going round and round."

Crooke took her off down the room, and on the way encountered a tall, broad-shouldered young man, who gave him a familiar nod and said:

"Hello! guv'nor, here I am accordin' to 'greement. What's up?"

"Go to the platform," said Crooke, hurriedly. "You'll find my friend there. I'll be back in five minutes."

The young man nodded and went on, while Crooke took the girl to the door, called a hack, put her in, and said in a low tone:

"Now then, you go home and go to bed, or you'll get into trouble. The police are watching you. It's lucky I came when I did. That young fellow's drugged you, and be means mischief."

Then, not giving the astonished and more than half intoxicated girl a chance to answer, he slammed the door, gave the driver a two-dollar note, and told him to drive to Rivington street, giving him the number.

"And take that girl in and leave her there, or you'll get into trouble."

The driver nodded and went off, while Crooke returned to the hall, and found Billy Boots asleep, Mary regarding him with a look of mingled scorn and disgust that she did not attempt to conceal.

The broad-shouldered young man was seated at a table near by, and Crooke beckoned him up and whispered:

"Now, Riley, let's get to business. Are you ready for the job I want you to do?"

The prize fighter—for it was the great but not quite invincible "Knocker Out" who had come to meet him by appointment—nodded in his usual sullen way.

"Ay, ay, what is it?"

Mary looked at him with great curiosity and some admiration, for he was about as fine a specimen of physical humanity as could be found anywhere, and only the sullen look of his face prevented it being exceedingly handsome.

"Are you the terrible man that has handled so many like children?" she asked, in her low, rich tones. "Why, I thought to see a very different man. You don't look a bit like a bruiser, Mr. Riley."

A smile of vanity broke out over his face; for, like all his class, he was not averse to flattery, and he answered with a modesty that became him:

"I hope not, ma'am. People think we're a great deal worse than we are. I always try to behave like a gentleman."

"Well, well," interrupted Crooke, impatiently, "that's neither here nor there. Mary, you don't want to go making love to Riley. He's got three or four girls on a string now. I want to know if you're willing to come to the Tennis Club and play off green, to let yourself be knocked about by some gentlemen, and not hit out till I give you the word?"

The prize fighter nodded.

"If you can fix me up so they won't know me, Mr. Crooke. The young fellows mostly knows my face pretty well."

"I'll see you're disguised, and all you have to do is to keep your mouth shut. I'll tell them you're a Russian, and don't understand English."

"But I ain't," objected Riley. "Don't know a word of any lingo of that sort."

"But you talk Irish."

Riley grinned.

"Ay, ay, a little. Not much."

"That's all I want. Talk what you know. There won't be any one to detect you, and I've got it all fixed for you."

"Who'm I to spar with?" asked Riley, in a tone of curiosity. "No big men, I hope, 'cause I don't want to get hammered for nothin'; and if I lose my temper and hit out, I'm sure to hurt 'em."

"No, I'll give you some greenhorns that think they can box. You're to let them knock you about to encourage them, till we coax the two that I want to settle."

"And who are they?"

"You remember young Noble, that wanted to fight you in the hotel?"

"Do I? I guess I do. Is he the sucker?"

The eyes of the prize-fighter glowed like burning coals as he spoke, and Crooke smiled as he answered:

"He's one; but he's not the most dangerous."

"Dangerous?"

Riley laughed scornfully as he said it.

"Dangerous? I should say not. I'll settle him with jest one hot 'un. Who's the other?"

"Do you remember the thin man in glasses, that was in the room with him?"

"That Frenchman? Not him?"

Riley's face had changed and become rather grave as he asked the question.

Crooke nodded.

"Yes. He's the man. Give him all he wants."

Riley smiled and looked wise. Presently he put his finger on Crooke's arm and said:

"I say, guv'nor, excuse me, but do you know that feller's a deceivin' old coon?"

"Deceiving? Bah! you can whip him."

"Reckon I can; but that ain't neither here nor there. It ain't goin' to be so easy to knock out that old coon. I'll tell you one thing: he's jest the strongest old feller I ever come across. He's got a grip like a vise, and I've got an idee he knows how to hit too."

"Do you back out, then?" asked Crooke.

"No, sirree. Backout ain't my name, but I want you to understand that this here job's worth money. That's all."

"You shall have all you want," said the gambler, eagerly. "It may be worth a good deal of money to me to keep those two men from Squantum Bay races next day. D'ye take?"

Riley rubbed his nose and ejaculated:

"The deuce you say! Well, well, I see, I see. If you bring 'em up to the scratch, I'll take care they don't go to no races next day. You can bet on that. When's this racket to come off?"

"To-night's Saturday. The race comes on the next Tuesday. I shall want you Monday evening."

The prize fighter nodded.

"I'll be there. Anything more?"

"Nothing to-night. Stay. You see that boy asleep there?"

"Ay, ay. Pore little kid, he ought to be in bed afore this," said Riley, compassionately. "I hate to see boys round these places."

Crooke stared at him. It was the first time he had ever seen a spark of human feeling in the prize-fighter, and it amazed him.

"Well," he said, dryly, "he's not a kid at all. He calls himself a man. That's Billy Boots, the jockey."

Riley started and looked at the boy with an expression that amazed Crooke still more.

"The deuce, you say!" he exclaimed. "Why, guv'nor, I've heard a good deal of that boy. They tell me he's jest the boss rider, he is. You don't want nothen done to him, I hope, 'cause I ain't in the racket if you do. I wouldn't see a hair of that boy's head hurt fur ten thousand dollars."

"And why not?" asked Crooke, scornfully. "What's he to you, I'd like to know?"

Riley turned and looked at him with a frown under which Crooke quailed.

"That boy's a relation of mine," he said, "and I ain't goin' to see him hurt."

CHAPTER XXIV.

HUMAN NATURE.

CROOKE looked at the prize-fighter with amazement, ejaculating:

"A relation of yours? What relation?"

"Well, he's a sort of a nevy. I had a brother onst, who married that boy's mother's sister, and I ain't goin' back on him. So no fixin' of that boy. I won't stand it. Who has been a-givin' him whisky to-night? It's a darned shame."

And a glow of honest anger on the face of the prize-fighter showed that his good instincts

were by no means dead, and alarmed the gambler more than anything that had yet happened; for Riley had come to be his sole reliance to beat his foes, and the Knocker Out was not a man whom it was safe to oppose.

But Crooke could always change his tack at a moment's notice, and the discovery of the relationship offered certain advantages he was not slow to perceive.

"Why, Riley," he exclaimed, heartily, "this is better luck than I expected. Billy Boots your nephew? Well, I'm glad to hear that, for you'll be able to talk sense to the boy. No one's given him whisky, but he would insist on mixing wines, in spite of all I could say, and, as you see, he's dead drunk. I'm glad you told me this, for I was wondering how to take care of him. Will you take him home?"

"I won't do nothen else," said Riley, with the same suspicious air. "I'll take keer of him, you bet. You needn't to trouble yourself about him."

"But indeed you mistake me," said Crooke, eagerly. "That's just what I want you to do, and to talk reason with him in the morning. I'll make that boy's fortune for him if he'll stick to me. You see, he has got into the hands of that French sport and Noble, and they're trying to use him to ruin me. All I want him to do is to leave them and behave like a man of sense."

"Ay, ay, that's reasonable," returned Riley, more tractably. "You've been a good friend of mine, Mr. Crooke, and I'll talk to him like a Dutch uncle, 'stead of an Irish one. But I ain't goin' to hev no fixin' of hosses or boys, so far as he's concerned, and that's flat."

"I don't want any, Riley. He'll tell you himself what I've asked him to do, and I leave it to you if it's not reasonable. Well, Mary, what's the matter?"

He broke off rather ill temperedly; for Mary, who had been looking round the hall, bored by a conversation she did not fully understand, had just pulled his sleeve.

"What is it?" he repeated.

Mary nodded toward the gallery of the hall, which was specially appropriated to ladies and fine people, who came to see and not be seen.

"There's a woman in that gallery staring at us with an opera-glass," she said. "I wonder what she sees in us?"

Crooke turned and looked at the gallery, and a ghastly change came over his face.

A slender, handsome woman, dressed in the height of fashion, was looking at him intently through an opera-glass, and close beside her sat Colonel Plunger, the Unknown Sport, beaming on the scene through his glasses, but looking down into the hall as if he had not seen the party on the platform.

Mary's tones were sharp and suspicious, as she said to Crooke, noting his face:

"Do you know that woman, Philip?"

"No, no," he answered hurriedly. "Know her? Of course not. But the other, the man by her. Do you mark him, Mary? That is my bitterest enemy. Riley knows him. That is the man who must be taken from my path at any hazard."

"Who is he?" asked Mary, looking at the tall figure of the colonel with interest. "I'm sure he doesn't look dangerous. Why, he's an old man. He's as gray as a badger."

Riley chuckled.

"He's a deceivin' old coon, marm. Jest the sort of feller one would pick up for a flat on a month of Sundays, and get left every time. Don't you go to thinkin' he ain't dangerous, marm. I don't want to tackle him for nothen, I tell you."

Crooke had been glancing apprehensively up at the gallery, while this was going on, and he saw the woman take down her glasses, revealing the brunette face of Madame St. Aure, and say something to her companion, who nodded in reply.

Then she leveled the glasses again, and Mary said uneasily:

"I wonder who she's looking at? Sometimes I think it's me, then you. I wish you'd take me away, Philip. I don't like the looks of her. She seems like a woman who would put a knife into one, if she got a chance."

Crooke seemed relieved at the request, for he rose instantly, saying:

"You're quite right, my dear. I was foolish to bring you here. It's not the place for us. Good-night, Riley. Take care of the boy."

And so saying, he took Mary away into the crowd and got out of the place in a hurry, and unobserved, as he thought.

Meantime, however, as soon as he rose, the woman in the gallery turned to the colonel and said in French:

"He has seen us. I must follow and find who she is?"

The colonel waved his hand slightly.

"It imports not, madame. We know where he lives, and can find him."

"You mistake," she interrupted eagerly. "You do not know the man as I do. He can have a dozen of residences, and a wife in each. I am resolved to find him out to night, and find that woman."

Her black eyes glared, and she looked as dangerous as a tiger cat; but the colonel coolly responded:

"Not with me, madame. I have sense enough not to run into difficulty without a reason. If you wish to follow that pair, you must go alone."

"Monsieur, you insult me."

"Not at all, madame," he returned with a slight yawn. "We understand each other well. You ask me to take you here, incog., to see what the place is like, but you know I am not a mere cow to be milked dry, like Monsieur Noble. I say I have my reason for not following those people to-night. I want to see the gentleman they left behind them with the boy."

"The man of the boxe you mean," she said, looking down. "What can you have to do with him, monsieur?"

"That is my affair, madame. I have told you that I stand with you on a different footing from others. Before friends I treat you as a lady; but, alone, we understand each other. You are jealous of your nice husband, because he has another woman. I tell you, you are foolish. He does not tax you with your little escapades."

"No," she said, compressing her lips. "He had better not."

"Then allow him the same liberty. It is a matter of small importance to inquire into his love affairs. But in business it is necessary to take all the opportunities that come. Tell me truly, why did you come here?"

"To see him. Alphonse told me he had seen him with that woman and the boy tracked them in here. It was lucky I met you at the hotel. Now, question for question, why did you come to see me?"

The colonel smiled:

"Can you ask? A visit to a charming and graceful woman needs no excuse."

"Bah, a truce to compliments. You had an object. What was it?"

"I had an object? You say true. But it is not necessary to tell it, madame. Let us be frank, Coralie. We can he'p each other if we wish, and our desires do not clash together. You wish for what that I can give you?"

"Proof of that villain's perfidy. But you deny it to me. They have gone."

"What of that? I can find them at any time. Well, I'll give you the proof that you require. He has married that woman you saw with him, and I can send you to the house to see her to-morrow."

The Frenchwoman's eyes sparkled.

"Do that; only let me see her once, face to face, and you can ask of me what you will."

"Very well; that is a bargain. Do you swear to perform it, to do whatever I require?"

"I do, all but one thing."

"Then give up that young Noble. Cease to entice him, as you have done."

She shook her head with a scornful laugh.

"All but that. No, no, I cannot do that quite yet. He is too fresh, too young, too innocent. He amuses me. Besides there is that girl, that Miss Fanee. She gave me a look I never forgive. It is pleasure to humiliate that girl. I cannot forego that."

The colonel frowned at her.

"Then find out what you can for yourself, and I shall protect Frank."

"How, my friend?"

"By telling him your true character."

"No you will not, my friend."

"Indeed, why not? I have only to speak—"

"But you will not speak."

"Why not?"

"Because I remember you at Paris, when Angelique angered you so, and every one said you were foolish not to be revenged on her. And you said something then which made all Paris laugh. You said, 'No, no, she is a woman; no man can take revenge on a woman.' So, my friend, you see you will not expose me, or you would have done it already."

The colonel had flushed slightly, and set his teeth closely as he muttered:

"You're right. But you, you have no heart to which to appeal."

Now her face altered slightly as she said:

"Again you are wrong. It is because I have, at the bottom of all my wickedness, a heart, that I cannot give up this boy. But I promise one thing: I will not harm him, nor let Philippe pluck his feathers. I might have done it before this, but I will not, because I have a heart. And now, my friend, if you will be good enough to take me to my carriage, I shall be glad."

He rose then with the utmost politeness, and banded the fascinating countess, who had such singular ways and tastes, to a carriage in waiting outside. Then, in answer to her invitation, he said:

"Thanks, no; I will not go home with you to-night. I have to go back and see that man who boxes. I have business with him."

She looked a little alarmed.

"Do not get into a quarrel, my friend. I don't want to lose you, so soon after having found you."

He smiled and waved his hand.

"Have no fears, Coralie. He will not hurt me to-night. It is not his business."

He went back into the hall and went straight up to the boxer, who greeted him with a half-nod and a scowl. Riley had taken the sleeping boy on his arm quite tenderly, and was trying to rouse him from his stupor, when the colonel's approach interrupted him.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked.

The colonel rapped on the table.

"In the first place, monsieur, de plaisir of glass of wine vid you. Den I haf leetle business to talk. It mean money to you. Dat is plain. Vat wine you prefer?"

The boxer allowed a faint grin to cross his face as he replied:

"I ain't pertik'ler. Seein's you're a nob, I should say champagne was correct."

The colonel ordered a bottle at once, and as soon as it came filled the glasses.

"Now, monsieur," he said, "we vill be as quick as possible. I see you vid a man I know; and dat boy, he be drugged. I take great interest in dat boy. He is good leetle boy. Vat you going to do vid him?"

"I'm a-goin' to take him home, I am, and I've got a right to do it," said Riley, sharply. "That boy's a sort of a nevy of mine, and he won't come to no harm while I'm round. You can't have him for one thing."

"I don't want him, sare, but I want dat he be taken to his own home at once. You do not know where dat is."

"I'll take him to mine, and keep him till he gets over this," said Riley.

"You will not, sare."

Riley started and favored him with a scowl.

"And who'll prevent me?"

"De police, sare. It is now past twelve, and dey will be here in leetle time. I see de sergeant of de reserve come up de hall now. I vill call a carriage, and dat boy be taken to his home, or I s'all inform de police, and you know if you can afford dat."

Riley glanced down the center aisle of the hall and saw the buttons of the police, as the colonel had said. So he growled:

"I tell ye I don't want to do the boy no harm and I'm willin' to take him home, if I knowed where he lived."

"He lives at de house of Monsieur Bloodgood, and I am villing you should go with us to see him safe home sare. I told you I vant to talk de business. I do. We can do it on de vay dere. Will you come?"

Riley's face cleared up.

"Then why didn't ye say so to onst! Of course I'll go. Here, you take one side of him. I'll take the other. The cops won't disturb us. They know me too well."

And so it resulted in poor little Billy Boots being carried bodily out of the hall and put into a back, which drove off to the Bloodgood mansion, where they gave in the boy at the area gate, to the great alarm and consternation of the cook and scullery maid, and the secret delight of the waiter, who was jealous of Billy's influence over the female part of the house, since he had blossomed out into a jockey.

Then the colonel turned away with the boxer, taking his arm as fearlessly as if they had not been alone in the dark streets, and opened the conversation by asking:

"Well, sare, and how much dat man offer

you to knock me out of time? I am villing to pay you double to be on my side, and you haf your living to make as well as de rest of us."

The boxer, for the first time, felt a little confused as he answered:

"Why, nothin'. What put sich an idee into your head? I ain't that kind of a man. I don't hire out to slug people."

"Pardon, sare. I was about to say dat if you would like such a job, I pay well."

"How much would you pay?"

"Dat depend on de danger, sare. To beat dat Toughy was worth a good deal."

The boxer laughed.

"Oh, I ain't got nothin' ag'in' him. He's a darned good man. I kin knock him out but not in four rounds, I reckon. But what's the job you want done?"

"I vill let you know, sare, de next time we meet. It may be to save a friend of mine, ven you spar vid him."

Riley looked at him suspiciously.

"Do you mean that Noble feller?"

"I might, sare."

"Then we might as well stop right here," answered the boxer, pausing in the street and looking wicked. "Ef ever I put on the gloves with that feller I'm going to give him a hot one, and I wouldn't take a thousand dollars for the chance. Do you understand that?"

The colonel as soon as the other paused stepped back a couple of paces, cautious and expecting a sudden attack. As soon as Riley finished he answered:

"Very well then. I'll stop you now."

CHAPTER XXV.

ON GUARD.

As he said these words the colonel let both hands drop to his sides, and eyed Riley sternly as they stood under a gas-lamp. The boxer stood looking at him in turn, as if he hardly believed his ears.

"You'll do what?" he growled.

"I'll stop your fighting now, and once for all," was the reply.

"How?" asked Riley, making a step nearer.

"By putting a hole right through you if you come one step closer," said the colonel, in a quiet conversational tone, but not so much as lifting a hand.

For one moment the Knocker Out sunk into himself, gathering for a spring; but there was something in the attitude of the old soldier, so confident, that he thought better of it, and shook his head.

"Oh you're a deceivin' old coon," he said not in the least put out of temper. "I ain't givin' myself away to-night, I ain't. You kin beat me on the shoot, and I've got a livin' to make. Good-night."

So saying he wheeled round and stalked off, while the colonel quietly uncocked the two derringers he had been holding in his hands, and returned them to the pockets of his coat, from which he had taken them while in the carriage.

"I must get first chance at that man," he muttered. "I think I know a way to get in on him, and show him that I've not forgotten all I learned."

He proceeded to his lodgings, where he retired to rest as the clocks struck one in the morning, but was up again early, mounted on the same horse he had used before, and bound on the same errand to the Central Park.

This morning he was destined to meet more agreeable company than before, however, for he had hardly gone three hundred yards into the Ride, when he saw a young lady, in a black riding habit and orthodox black hat, before him, riding slowly along, followed by a small groom, in whom the colonel was not slow to recognize Billy Boots.

Poor Billy was as white as a sheet and had a most woebegone expression. As the colonel passed him the boy tried to smile, but the effort was in vain, and the sad grin that followed, showed that Billy was suffering from a racking headache, and feeling very sick.

The colonel nodded to him and ambled past him beside Miss Fanny, who turned her head quickly, and gave him a stiff little bow, to which the colonel responded by lifting his hat and observing:

"It is a charming morning, mademoiselle, and I am charm to see you. I did not know that in dis countree de ladies had de custom of riding so early. Believe me, it is de best medicine for beauty. It gif de rose to de cheek, de flesh to de eye, and improve de

health. Monsieur votre pere—your fader—he do not ride!"

"Very seldom," she answered, coldly, not anxious to prolong the conversation, but hardly knowing how to rebuff such a very polite personage.

"Dat is pitee, mademoiselle. I am not quite so old as monsieur, but I make de practice of de regular ride. In dis countree I notice von t'ing in de men I meet. Dey seem always to ride at de funeral pace. Dey walk, walk all de time, and de ladee too. Do you nevair take de trot or gallop?"

"It's not considered the correct thing to ride at speed," returned Fanny, with a slight rise of color. "We leave that to the circus riders and fast people."

The colonel bowed and smiled.

"I see. It is not dat you are afraid to ride fast, but—Aha—here come some one behind us. To de right, mademoiselle. Dis path is narrow."

As he spoke they heard the rapid patter of galloping hoofs, and Madame St. Aure, in a riding-habit a little "louder" than usual, dashed past them, alone.

As she passed she turned in her saddle and called out to the colonel:

"Hola, mon gars! Que fais tu la? Tete de cochon, la p'tite! Ah ca! Mon jeune homme me suivra toute de suite."

[Hello, my boy, what are you at. By Jove the little one! Oh, my! My young man is coming right after me.]

Fanny did not understand the rapid French; but she colored high and asked:

"Do you know that person?"

"Know her? No more dan de rest of de world. I know who she is."

"And who?"

Fanny stopped and flushed deeply. She was afraid the question might bring an answer she did not wish to hear.

But the colonel laughed, and answered:

"Oh, dere is no harm in her. Do not be afraid. Coralie St. Aure is her name in de ring, I believe."

"In the ring?" echoed Fanny.

"But yes. You do not understand?"

"I confess I do not. I've heard of rings in politics, and—"

"And at the races?"

"Yes. But you don't mean—?"

"No, no, but dere are oder rings. Think of all de rings, you know."

Fanny smiled.

"You don't mean a fairy ring?"

"No. Yet stay. It is a fairy ring to some, to many of us, to de children for example."

"Please explain. I don't understand."

"Are dere no oder rings?"

"None that ever I heard of, except it's a wedding ring."

"Ah, ver' good, ver' good. But, no, dere is another ring still. Tell me, mademoiselle, ven you vas leetle shild; you nevair go to see de cirque?"

"The circus? No. They wouldn't let me. I never saw one in my life."

"Ah ca. You have missed a pleasure, mademoiselle. Well, in de circus, dey ride in de ring, and Madame St. Aure she ride six horses at once. I do not know another woman can do it."

Fanny curled her lip.

"Oh, is that all? A circus rider? I thought she must be an actress from the way she dressed."

"But no. And I tell you it is something be great rider like dat. Madame St. Aure she get big salares and have de fine horse. Sometime she teach de young man to ride. Ma foi, I take lesson in Paris myself. Dat vy she call to me. I assure you dere is no harm in her."

Fanny tossed her little head.

"I'm sure it's nothing to me, only I think it's rather strange for young men to be associating with such people."

The colonel smiled, and just as he was about to answer they heard the rapid patter of another galloping horse behind them, and Frank Noble dashed up.

As he passed them he turned his head slightly, raised his hat to Fanny and sped on again at the same rapid rate, while the young lady bit her lips, colored high, and murmured to herself:

"We'll see, sir, we'll see who can keep it up longest."

The colonel saw what was passing in her mind, but he made no remark upon it, and presently he said to her:

"Vat do you say, mademoiselle, to a little gallop? De vay is all clear now, and ve s'all run into no persons."

She nodded consent. She felt angry, and the rapid motion offered a vent to her excited feelings. She had come out hoping to see Frank and make it up with him, only to be disappointed again and to know he had galloped on after her pet hatred, the circus-riding Madame St. Aure. The presence of the colonel bored her, and he seemed determined not to be shaken off; so she made the best of it, gave the whip to the bay pony, and started off.

The colonel looked approvingly at her as her pliant figure yielded to the motion of the pony, and made several remarks tending to encourage her, for he saw that she was a timid rider and needed counsel.

This she took in good part, for they tended to divert her mind from the thoughts of Frank, and so they rode on harmoniously till they came to the end of the ride, and met, as the colonel had known they would, Madame St. Aure returning with Frank Noble, both horses foaming from the pace at which they had ridden, the French woman chattering away, Frank listening and saying little.

The colonel saw them some way off, and said to his companion:

"To the right. Let us go into the Drive. I do not wish dat woman to speak to you, and she is capable of it."

"Oh, for mercy's sake, no!" ejaculated the girl, and she urged her pony into a gallop till they were in the Drive, among the vehicles, safe from further meetings in lonely bridle-paths.

Then the colonel took her back to the Fifth avenue gate, and allowed her to go home unattended, while he rode into the bridle-path again and met, as he had expected, Frank and madame on their way back.

"Tiens, mon gars!" cried the volatile Coralie as soon as she saw him, "what did you with the demoiselle, so stiff and so baughty? Are you giving her the lesson, as I do to monsieur?"

"Possibly," was the tranquil answer. "At all events, 'tis my affair, Coralie, and I make my own road without aid. I told you to leave the boy alone. Are you set on quarreling with me?"

He spoke in French, and she answered in the same language, regardless of the half-sulky, half-puzzled glance of Frank.

"As you say, I take my road. Look out who gets in the way. Be it so."

Her face was flushed and her eye shot an angry glance at the colonel, who became calm on the instant, replying:

"Very well; be it so. You bring it on yourself, and I am not to blame."

Then he said, in his affected broken English, which he seemed to put on only before certain persons:

"I was asking madame for de privilege of attending de rehearsal to-day, but she say no."

"The rehearsal? What rehearsal?"

The young man looked amazed, as he continued to madame:

"What? Are you on the stage? I declare I didn't know it."

Madame made no answer, but her black eyes flashed as she looked at Colonel Plunger and muttered:

"Scelerat! Il m'a trahie!"

(Wretch! He has betrayed me!)

The colonel shrugged his shoulders.

"Eh, my friend, but you do not read de papers. Did you not see de great show advertise to open to-morrow? Madame is de star, de bright star of de galaxie. Dey haf final rehearsal to-day, and I did vant you to see madame in her act. It is extraordinaire."

Frank stared harder than ever.

"Act? What act? What do you mean?"

Madame broke in with an air of angry bravado that made her look handsomer than usual.

"Ah bah! colonel. Vy you beat de bush in flat mannaire. Tell monsieur vat you mean. Yes, mon amie, it is true. I am a woman and I haf to live. I do de honest work to live. I am not actrice, but I do my act like de rest. I am de queen of de ring. Make vat you like of it. I know vat de vorld say. I s'all lose you as I lose de rest. You say, yes, she is femme charmante, but you turn away de head ven you know me. Et pourquo? I do not stamp and scream on de stage. I do not sing de ballade, de chansonette. I ride. Dat is all."

Then she turned on the colonel with an expression of concentrated rage and hissed out:

"Toi! Tu es lache! Entends tu? Mais je me vengerai. Gare a toi!"

[Thou! thou're a coward! Hearst thou? But I'll be revenged. Beware!]

And with the word she gave her horse a fierce lash and darted away at a racing speed down Fifth avenue, putting it out of their power to follow.

Frank indeed was inclined to do it, but the colonel caught his bridle, and said quietly:

"Let her go, my boy. I know Coralie of old. She is quick tempered; but it is soon over. She will go home, have a good cry and will turn to some one else."

"But what's the matter?" asked Frank in a tone of exasperation. "What with her French and yours, I'm bewildered. What does it all mean? What's she angry at? Is she crazy or am I?"

"Neither? Is it possible you do not see?"

"See what?"

"The profession of Coralie?"

"What profession?"

"True, what? Well, I will tell you. She is no countess, and St. Aure is only her professional name. What does the name sound like in English?"

"St. Aure? St. Aure! Why is it Centaur?"

"Precisely. And a Centaur is—?"

"A being half man, half horse."

"Yes, and they say of a good rider, he is a perfect Centaur. Madame has no equal as a rider. Why? Because it is her trade, her profession. Look there!"

As he spoke they were opposite a huge mass of boarding, erected before a new building not yet finished. Over the face of this boarding was pasted a huge circus bill fifteen feet high, with the figure of a woman in tights who stood on the backs of two horses, on the outside of two more, with a third pair driven before her while she waved a whip in the air.

On the top of the bill was a broad band, known to bill-posters as a "streamer" bearing the legend:

"ST. AURE, THE PEERLESS."

Below the figure another band on which was inscribed:

"EMPEROR OF THE ARENA."

"You see," remarked the colonel in a cynical tone, "titles cost not'ing in de ring. Countess or empress, one is as easy as de oder. Well, my friend, do you comprehend now vy I say: Go to de Fourth avenue and look at de bills! I haf said not von vord; but if you vant free ticket I gif you many as you require."

But Frank only shook his head and rode on. The sight of the circus bill had made a revolution of feeling in him which it was hard to undo. He had been nursing all sorts of romantic theories about the French countess, and the discovery that she was a circus rider completely disillusionized him.

"I don't want any tickets," he said in a stifled voice. "By Jove, I feel sorry for that woman. So handsome and accomplished, and yet it's all changed the moment they call her a mere circus-rider. I wish we'd never met. I don't wonder Fanny Bloodgood scowled at me for riding with her. I wonder if she knows? Confound it! What a fool I've been."

"Not so, my friend. You did not know, dat was all. I did. It is all over now. Let it warn you not to be too confiding in strangers."

"But, confound it," exclaimed the young man, suddenly, "Cooke introduced me to her as a countess."

"Precisely. Monsieur Cooke is—what you t'ink to her? Her husband."

"Husband!" echoed Frank. "Why, by Jove, that fellow's a perfect blackguard. How dared he? He left me alone with her, and by Jove, colonel, she—but never mind—I won't tell tales out of school. One thing, she's taught me more riding in three days than I ever learned before."

The colonel laughed.

"Dat is de right vay to look at it. Come, let us trot home. You come out to ride to-morrow, my friend?"

"No. By Jove, I might meet her, and I'd not know what to say."

"Have no fear! She will not be here. De season begin to-morrow, and she haf too much work to spend in morning rides. You go ride as usual, and try to make up with Mees Fannie. You can do it. She is jealous, and dat

mean she like you, my friend. Vere you go to-morrow night?"

Frank colored slightly.

"Another folly, I'm afraid. See here, I've got to pull up, colonel, and you must help me, after to-morrow."

"How? Vat you mean?"

"Well, I'm nearly through my engagements. To-morrow night I'm invited to go to the Tennis Club. There's to be a friendly set-to between some of our gentlemen amateurs, and I'm invited to put on the gloves with a Russian gentleman just arrived, a friend of Harry St. John. I tell you what. I'm invited to bring a friend with me. Do you spar? No, of course not. You're a Frenchman."

"And you t'ink dey know not'ing of de boxe. Eh bien, mon ami, I vill go vid you. I like to see de boxe. Maybe I try a leetle myself. You box?"

Frank smiled with some pride.

"Old man Jenkins calls me his best pupil, and I have put on the gloves with professionals before now; but of course not with heavy weights."

"I vill go vid you, mon ami. You say dis is a Russe dat spar? Dat is strange. Dey spar not in Russie."

"Oh, this is some prince, traveling in disguise, who learned in England. They say he's too much for most of them, and they've asked me to try him. He don't talk a word of English. St. John writes me that Cooke introduced him."

"Dat Cooke again? Hem! Dat is very strange. Is dat man receive yet, after de trouble at de cards?"

"St. John don't know of it, and you know we agreed to hush it up. Mustn't be too hard on the poor devil, colonel. Really it was a rough thing you did to him to pin his hand to the table, and he might not have meant to cheat."

The colonel looked at him with the dryest of smiles, as he answered:

"He might not. True. Ah, my friend, you will learn de vorld some day. Now, I bid you good hy."

"Where are you going?"

"To see Madame St. Aure. I haf hurt de poor woman, and I go to make it up. Adieu."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE TENNIS CLUB.

THE high blank wall of the Tennis Club building has long been a familiar object to Gothamites going up town in the cars; but the interior of the building is a mystery to the multitude, the club being as exclusive in its way as the Decade itself.

None but the "gilded youth" are elected members, and the double advantages of a vigorous frame and plenty of money are requisites in new candidates.

The club prides itself on its muscle and gentility combined, and preserves faithfully a tradition that a gentleman can always beat a "common fellow," and that a man of the Tennis Club can whip any man of the Decade who is not also a "Tennis." In proof of this they proudly point to the fact that one of their crack amateurs, Jack June, horsewhipped a young but wicked millionaire belonging to the Decade, in front of his own club, and nearly got the best of the long-haired and many-scalped Mustang Mike, the hero of the Plains, on another occasion, in which Jack had sworn that Mike should get out of a certain house, and Mike refused so to do.

To be sure, eye-witnesses of the first fight said that there was no great glory in the horsewhipping, as Jack weighed at least thirty pounds more than the man he whipped; and, as to the second, as a matter of fact, Mustang Mike did not leave the house, while Jack June did, and went home to bed, from whence he did not emerge for a week after.

But the Tennis Club had a happy way of forgetting its little defeats and blowing the loudest of trumpets over its victories, so that in the club annals the figure of Jack June always appeared as a giant with a horsewhip, and it was voted vulgar to refer to "Mustang Mike" as having ever got the best of Jack.

On the evening before the last day of the Quantum Bay Races, the Tennis Club was in a flutter of excitement, owing to the fact that Mr. Harry St. John, the secretary, had secured the presence of a Russian prince, undoubtedly true and genuine, who could only say "yes" and "no" in English, but who

had acquired in his travels a passion for boxing, and had vanquished every amateur he had met in Europe.

At first the Club was inclined to put up Jack June against the prince, who bore the significant name of Nockstiffsky, but as soon as Jack saw the Russian he had pleaded want of condition and fifty pounds of fat too much, while the stranger was a thin, raw-boned fellow, with a pair of cruel black eyes that looked as if their owner delighted in "slogging."

So, in desperation for the credit of the club, Mr. St. John had bethought himself of the latest addition, in the person of Frank Noble, who was game for any thing, and had written the note which brought our hero to the club that night.

When Frank came to the rooms, he found a large crowd of his friends assembled, and the buzz of conversation announced that betting was going on, for the gentlemen of the Tennis Club were always ready to back their opinions on any subject of sport whatever.

The young man came in with Colonel Plunger, in precise black, the gray mustache and gleaming glasses of the veteran looking out of place in the midst of the burly young men around him.

Frank was greeted with boisterous glee, and his friends commenced to question him as to his condition, and to give him all sorts of advice as to his encounter with the Russian nobleman, who was said, by those who had seen him, to be:

"A confounded well-made fellow; looks wicked, too."

"Has de gentleman come yet?" asked the colonel, sweetly.

"No," returned the person addressed, who was none other than Jack June, big and burly as ever, with an overbearing smile, "he'll be here at nine I say, Noble, who's your friend? Introduce me."

Noble did as requested, and Jack said:

"Happy to see you, colonel. Heard a good deal of you at Squantum Bay Races. Call you the Unknown Sport already. I say, you Frenchman, don't spar, do you? Stick to the foils, eh?"

"Sometime, sare. Sometime dey try de sabre, de lance, de baionette, de savatte. You know de savatte, sare?"

"The savatte. Oh yes, that's the kicking business," returned Jack, scornfully. "Don't believe in it. All humbug. Bet I can lick any fellow that tries it. Do you know the savatte, colonel?"

He looked so overbearing that it was evident the colonel was, in his eyes, a safe butt to poke fun at.

To the astonishment of the young men all round, the colonel answered:

"I am professeur du savatte, monsieur, at your service. How much you bet I do not put you on dis floor to-night, if you like?"

Jack's eyes sparkled as he answered:

"What you like! Here's fun, boys."

"Den suppose we say five thousand, sare," said the colonel, calmly, producing his pocket-book. "Monsieur Noble hold de stake for us."

Jack's countenance fell.

"Can't go so much. Try you five hundred. It's all I've got to-night."

"So be it, sare; here is my monie."

And Jack, who was not a millionaire, had to go down into his pockets and try all his friends, before he could get up the stakes.

When he had done so and stripped, the contrast between him and his slender antagonist was marked. Jack stood six feet two in his stockings and weighed two hundred and thirty, while the colonel was three inches shorter, and looked like a pygmy to June.

Both men had stripped to their trowsers and undershirts, and both were in their stocking feet, while it was understood that either might do what he chose, so long as he did not take off the gloves.

"Jack's got a pudding," whispered Mr. St. John to Courtland, who stood by. "He'll eat that Frenchman up."

"I don't know that," returned Courtland, thoughtfully. "The colonel looks as if he knew his business, too."

In fact, the veteran was standing just out of reach of his gigantic opponent, with a confident smile on his face, his hands down by his hips, while Jack was sparring cautiously for an opening.

Presently the big man made a rush for the little one, trying to beat down his guard by main strength, and the colonel evaded it so

neatly, by a simple step to one side, that the room rung with applause.

A moment later the veteran dashed in, gave a spring in the air, landed both feet in his enemy's ribs, and sent big Jack June sprawling on the floor, with an irrepressible grunt of pain.

The colonel had struck him on the edge of the diaphragm, known to the boxing fraternity as the "wind," and had knocked the breath all out of him, so that Jack was not only unable to "come to time," but had to be taken to a dressing-room, where he vomited freely before he could go home.

The Tennis Club was astounded; and in the midst of its mortification came Crooke, the well-known Boss Better, with the tall and imposing figure of Prince Nockstiffsky leaning on his arm.

A thrill of fear ran through the club.

Frank Noble was admittedly a finely-built young man, but the Russian was perfection.

His shoulders were so square that his waist looked like a lady's, and he stood as tall as Jack June, while not an ounce of fat was on his frame, and his hard, bony face looked that of a man who could fight all day and night.

Every one began to compare him with Frank, and to say to the rest:

"The Russian's too much for him."

The stranger had a fierce black mustache and was as dark as an Indian. He seemed to be rather bashful than otherwise, and only bowed and muttered some Russian words in answer to the introductions showered on him, while Crooke proceeded to his business at once with St. John.

"Come, I've brought my friend. Where's your man, Noble?"

"He's ready. But I say, Crooke, no slogging. Tell your friend to play light."

"He never plays light. If the club's afraid it's always easy to back down. Where's the illustrious Jack June?"

"Home, sick."

"Well, then, the sooner you tell Noble to get ready, the better the prince will like it."

"Excuse me, sare," here put in the bland voice of the colonel, who came up and stood beside them still in his shirt sleeves, "but do I understand you claim dat man to be a Russian prince?"

"Of course," returned Crooke, hastily.

The colonel turned to the crowd and cried:

"Messieurs, you are deceived. Have you no eyes? Dat man is no prince. It is Riley, de boxaire, disguise. Dat is not his mustache. I show you."

And before any one could divine his intention he suddenly cast one of the gloves he held in his hand so sharp and true that he knocked the false mustache off Riley's lip and exposed the well-known features of that boxer.

The next minute there was a chorus of:

"Shame! shame! Put him out!"

But no one advanced to execute the threat on the renowned boxer, who seemed to be in his element now, as he looked round him and stripped off his upper clothing in a moment.

"Put me out, will yer?" he roared, and as he spoke a ring cleared round him as if by magic. "Let's see the man to do it. I'll clean out yer whole club if a man tries to hit me."

And there was something grand in the big boxer as he stood there, in the pride of his strength, defying a hundred athletes.

Then out of the press rushed Frank, with the boxing-gloves on, and cried:

"Russian or not, I'll spar him for the honor of the Tennis Club."

Riley turned good-humored instantly.

"Hooray for you, young feller," he cried. "You're grit, you are, and you're my mutton. Give us the gloves, gents. I don't want to hit the pore cuss with my fist."

In a moment the colonel was out by Frank, and cried out earnestly:

"Don't do it, boy. He'll kill you. He wants to do it. Here, Riley, you, I'll fight you for the club as we stand, bare-fisted and rough-and-tumble."

There was an instant yell of applause. These high-toned young men were getting drunk with excitement and eager for blood, while the prize-fighter roared:

"All right. Take keer of yourself, for here comes Tom Riley."

The next moment he rushed at the colonel, who dodged under and behind him in the midst of the crowd, and Riley missed his mark.

Another moment, and the gigantic form of the boxer was seen to rise in the air and pitch

forward, head-first, on the hard floor, with a crash.

Those who were near had seen the colonel stoop down an instant and lift the boxer under the thighs, taking him off his feet by surprise and cracking his skull on the hard floor with a force that would have killed most men, but which only knocked the boxer senseless.

And the colonel had not struck him a single blow, nor had the boxer had a chance to deliver one.

For a moment there was a dead silence in the room, and then a tremendous cheer burst forth, while the young men came crowding round the veteran, shaking his hand, hugging him, wild with joy that the credit of the club was saved.

"We'll vote you in an honorary member, by Jove!" cried Kettleton, enthusiastically. "Only tell us how you did the trick. I don't understand it."

The colonel laughed. "My dear sare, shall I show you? Dere is not'ing like experience."

"No, thank you."

And there was a general laugh as Kettleton started back, thinking the colonel in earnest.

Then the veteran looked round and said, in his polite, grave way:

"Messieurs, I tell you von t'ing: You must not be too ready to trust de foreigner. De Russian do not box. He fence. To fight a boxaire vid de glove is foolish. It is to take him vere he vant to go. To try him vid trick he do not understand is de only way. I would not try dat same trick vid dat man again. He would know it. See, he come to. Now you get de police, or dere vill be trouble. Vere is Monsieur Crooke dat brought him?"

But Crooke had vanished, and was no more seen that night, while Riley, as he was escorted to the door by a mob of young men armed with Indian clubs, had turned as meek as Moses, and only remarked as he went down stairs:

"I knowed he was a deceivin' old coon, but I didn't reckon on that. Why, it's a foul trick, that's what it is, and I'll be even with him yet fur it."

The colonel heard him, but made no reply, and peace reigned over the Tennis Club once more, while a meeting was hastily called to order, and Colonel Plunger elected an honorary member forswit.

He took the compliment very quietly, and soon made an excuse to go home with Frank Noble, to whom he said, as soon as they were alone:

"My friend, you must be careful now. Dat Crooke, he mean mischief. To-morrow he be on de course, and vill banter you to bet. So far we have got de best of him, and you have not lost money. Now he vill try to recover his ground by one grand stroke. You must not bet vid him. You have seen him expose as a sharper in de club, and you must not bet vid him."

"But who will, colonel?"

"I will. I have long score to settle vid dat man. I settle it to-morrow forever."

CHAPTER XXVII.

BEFORE THE RACE.

ONCE more we are on the race-course, which is thronged as it never was thronged before, to witness the closing day of a most successful meeting.

The event of the day to which every one was looking forward with most interest was the four-mile race; for Americans take a special pride in this species of contest, which reminds them of their most famous horses of old times, and belongs to their own country as much as the Derby does to England.

Governor Bloodgood, stately and white-haired, was to be seen on that day on the members' stand, in the midst of a group of friends who had backed Ambition for the race; and the Governor was so elated with the praises bestowed on his horse and himself by people who had hitherto been inclined to view him as a deluded old victim to abler turf operators, that he began to put on knowing airs about horses, and even to think seriously about breaking his resolution never to bet money on a horse race.

For the day the coin mania was set aside for the turf mania with him, and he was so carried away by it, that he greeted Frank Noble as soon as he saw him, with the astounding speech, from the mouth of such a man:

"Mr. Noble, you can back Ambition to-day."

for all you're worth. The horse is fit to run for a man's life."

Frank stared at him.

"Do you really mean it, sir?" he asked. "I thought you were invincibly opposed to betting?"

"So I am, so I am on ordinary races," said the old gentleman, flushing slightly. "You are quite right to remind me. But this is a different case. My horse is *sure* to win the race, and if any one is foolish enough to put money against him it may as well be taken in."

"Then you only believe in betting on a sure thing?" observed Frank, inquiringly.

"Certainly, certainly. It ceases to be a bet then. By the by, Noble, what's the reason you haven't been to see us lately?"

Frank was more and more amazed. What did this mean? The Governor had been cold and haughty before; now he was overflowing with cordiality. Contrary to his usual custom, too, he was in the spice appropriated to members, and his daughter was nowhere to be seen.

Frank looked round, and answered:

"Frankly, sir, because I fancied I might not be entirely welcome. You seemed to be offended with me before for winning money on Ambition, so I lost some on Fanny Flyaway, and that seemed to anger you still more. I have had the pleasure of seeing Miss Bloodgood since then in the Park, and she has given me the cut direct. I hardly think you can well wonder at my keeping away after all that, sir."

The Governor heard him through, and then said, gravely:

"What you have said is all true, but circumstances have happened since then that have altered my opinion of you. Tell me, are you at liberty to dine at my house this evening?"

"Certainly, Governor, with pleasure."

The young man could not conceal his delight at the overture.

"Then we will consider it an engagement. By the by, I understand that you will soon be of age."

"Yes, sir. Under my grandfather's will I enter into full possession, by virtue of becoming twenty-five years old, on the 9th of September; that is the day after to-morrow. You remember, you were a witness to the will."

"True. Your grandfather was a careful man, but a little prejudiced against real estate for an investment. I should like to talk a little business with you on that subject."

He seemed so familiar and friendly, so different to what he had been before, that Frank could not understand it, but it was all very pleasant to him, and he was quite willing to resume relations with the Governor's family, especially with the woman whom he felt every day that he really loved more, the longer he was parted from her.

So he took a cordial leave of the Governor, and went down on the quarter-stretch to follow the old man's advice and back Ambition, when he saw Colonel Plunger, surrounded by a ring of turfmen, opposite to Crooke, the Boss Better, both men with open books in their hands.

As he came near he heard the colonel say, with hardly a trace of foreign accent in his voice:

"You know very well who I am, sir, and I know you too. I offer to put up the money in the hands of the president of this club, if you will do the same. I am quite willing to bet even with you, if I know the money to be safe, not otherwise."

The turfmen looked at Crooke, who said:

"It's not the usual custom. I'm too well known for any one to think I shall run away without paying my debts."

"At the same time it is also well known that you have lost heavily lately, and it is only fair that you should not be allowed to bet on credit. I ask none. Here is my money. Any amount you like, ten, twenty, a hundred thousand, if you wish, on Ambition, even. I ask no odds. Put up the money or stop. I am indifferent which."

"Ay, ay, put up or shut up," said more than one voice, and a man in the rear called out:

"Bully for the Plunger! He's the boy that has the nerve."

Crooke glanced round him and saw that his reign was over unless he could beat the Plunger, so, with an air of resignation, he said:

"Very well, if you put it that way, I am

willing to bet. I'll put all I'm worth on Voyageur. Come up to the members' stand, and I'll deposit the money. Half a million if you like. It takes a better man than you to back Phil Crooke down."

The colonel laughed, and inquired:

"Is that correct? I thought last night and and the episode of the Decade Club had convinced you that I was just that very man. How does your hand get along?"

The turfites looked at each other as if they wondered what he meant, and the gambler hastily exclaimed:

"I didn't come here to talk. Money is the thing. Come along. I see our man over yonder."

The colonel bowed and followed him, and one of the turfites said to Frank:

"What does he mean about the Decade? There seems to be a good deal of feeling between those two men."

Frank answered him evasively, and then followed the two men to the president of the club, with whom was lodged an amount of money that made the oldest gamblers stare, and say to one another:

"By Jove, that's plunging for you. I'm out of that sort of thing. They must have both come prepared for it."

For the money had been counted out in bills of ten thousand dollars each, and ten of these were lodged by each man in the hands of the stake-holder.

Then they saw Crooke walk away, rather paler than usual, with a grave, thoughtful look on his face, and betake himself in the direction of the stables, where he was seen conversing with the trainer of Voyageur, while the colonel went up on the members' stand and said something to Governor Bloodgood, at which the old gentleman smiled and answered:

"Perfectly right, sir. I only wish you had doubled it. But I need not say—"

"No. Honor, monsieur. That is our little affair. Till this evening."

And the colonel went away toward the stables, where he encountered Billy Boots, not yet attired in his radiant jockey dress, but looking like a common stable boy.

To Billy he said:

"Well, has she come?"

"No, boss, and I don't understand it. He nor she ain't been here, nor they ain't paid me no money yet on the race."

"Indeed?"

"I'm thinkin', boss, that they're countin' on Voyageur bein' the best hoss and goin' to run a square race. If they do, they're goin' to get suck'd in. That hoss won't stand the whip when he's tired. Coax him, and he'll run like a good one, but he ain't like Ambition. Why, boss, I believe if that there hoss was a-dyin' of presumption, he'd hobble up to the scratch and run on three legs, ruther'n not run at all. It's grit as takes a hoss through in a four mile race and Ambition's got it, and the other hoss hain't."

"And you're sure of your race?"

"Sure, boss, if I kin hold the hoss in the fust mile. If he runs away, of course he mou't bolt the track or suthin', but I reckon I kin keep him from that."

The colonel nodded and walked away, muttering to himself:

"I wonder what's the matter now? Lester is not the man to give up his grip like that. There's some other plot hatching."

He explored the vicinity of the stables, but found no traces of the person he was searching for, Crooke's wife—if wife she really were—Mary Madden, ex-dressmaker.

Billy had told the colonel of his interview with Crooke and all that had happened, so that he fully expected to meet the gambler or his wife somewhere about the Bloodgood stables, trying to seduce Billy from his duty.

Instead of that, the Boss Better was talking to the trainer of the rival horse, as he had a right to do, and the colonel was puzzled as to what it all meant.

The weighing bell rung, half an hour later, and still no signs of Mary.

Billy Boots and Feeny, the jockey who was to ride Voyageur, sauntered to the paddock with their saddles, and it was on the way there that the boy received his first intimation of Crooke's game.

Feeny, a gray-headed, wiry little man, whose utmost weight was never over ninety pounds sidled up to him on the way and whispered:

"Say, Billy, you want to earn a cool thousand?"

"In course I do," responded the boy, who had been previously tutored by the colonel to pretend to accept all overtures.

"How's it to be done? Who's findin' the stamps for this racket?"

"That's neither here nor there," responded Feeny cautiously. "I've got 'em, if you want to 'arn 'em."

"You?" retorted Billy with scorn. "Who'd trust you with a thousand? I ain't no sucker, to be fooled with pretty stories. I want to see the stamps afore I talk."

"Didn't you get your money for the Fanny Flyaway racket?" asked Feeny.

"Yes, if you want to know."

"Well then, the same man's standin' behind us now," responded the old jockey, in a low, cautious tone.

"Who? Crooke, do you mean?" asked Billy in a loud voice, regardless of strangers.

"Hush, ye darned fool," said Feeny in a manner indicating alarm. "D'ye want all the world to know our business?"

"No; but I want to know where my money is to come from."

"From me, if you like. I'll give you half now, and half arter the race if you'll jest talk business reasonable."

Feeny spoke very low, and Billy saw that he was afraid of being noticed; but the old jockey showed him, in the palm of his hand, a folded greenback, as they went on to the paddock, and whispered:

"It's yourn, if you talk biz, and another like it, if you'll let Ambition have his head in the first mile."

"Is that all?" asked Billy incredulously.

"That's all. Put him in for all he's worth on the first mile."

And old Feeny slipped the bill into his hand and calmly went into the weighing paddock.

Billy followed, but not before he had glanced at the bill in his hand, and in the corner the capital D, that told him he held five hundred dollars to follow the old jockey's advice.

As soon as he had been weighed, he took his way back to the stables, looking for Colonel Plunger, but not seeing him.

In his stead there was old Burton, the trainer, glum and surly as usual, but showing a certain politeness to Billy, with no symptoms of foul play about him. Ambition was brought out, full of life and spirits, and Billy climbed into the saddle to ride to the starting-post.

As he did so, the horse gave a wild leap in the air which almost unseated the boy, and went away at a gallop round the course, all alone.

In vain Billy pulled at his head, the bay seemed to be possessed with a sudden demon of viciousness, that Billy had never noticed in him before.

He stretched away at the top of his speed, shaking his head from side to side, and occasionally kicking up, till the boy said to himself:

"There's something the matter with the hoss or the saddle. Which is it?"

Not till Ambition had gone nearly three-fourths of a mile did the horse slacken his pace, and then he bolted for the stable and carried Billy into his stall, *nolens volens*, when the boy at last was able to tumble off and examine the harness.

As he had expected, there was trouble both in saddle and bridle. A small, sharp chestnut burr had been stuck in the saddle stuffing, and the hook of the curb-chain had been broken off in a manner that showed it had been previously filed through.

Billy set his teeth and muttered:

"That's the little game, is it? I'll show them pretty soon."

He hastily examined the inside of the saddle before he replaced it, took a spare curb chain from his pocket and made that part of the rig secure in as great a hurry as he dared exercise, and finally rode out of the stable at a sharp trot, to see the other horses at the post, the starter about to give them the word. Billy rode up with a tempest of cheers sounding round him from Ambition's backers, who had been thinking, a moment before, that the horse had been drawn at the start.

As the boy rode up beside Feeny, the old jockey grunted and said:

"Ye did that well, Billy. You kin have the best of the start."

"By gosh, I intend to get it," muttered the boy, and as he spoke he managed to let his

whip touch Voyageur in the flank, in a way that sent the rival horse off in a runaway that nearly lost Feeny his place. By the time the other horse was back, Ambition was in his place, trembling with eagerness.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE RACE AND AFTER.

"STEADY now! Walk your horses! Keep them straight! No jerking! Ready! GO!"

The words fell from the lips of the starter, after a quarter of an hour's fruitless scoring, in which Billy Boots had kept Ambition back and had started so many other horses to capering that he had once received the stern caution:

"Number Seventeen, if you don't quit that I'll send you to the stable."

After that, Billy had been quieter, but he managed to get the best of the start and let his horse jump to the lead, which it did in a way showing no evil effects from the previous run.

As the boy had foreseen, forcing the pace at the start was bad policy in such a long race, but he only allowed his horse to keep it for a quarter of a mile, when he gained the inside track, three lengths in advance of the ruck, sat down in his saddle and began to pull at Ambition's head.

Then the race began in earnest, for the horse resisted the bit, and it became evident that good judgment was required. If the boy pulled too hard, he might fret the horse more than if he let it go, and yet it was a question whether the tremendous pace could be kept up long.

Billy turned in his saddle and saw that Voyageur was somewhere in the rear, while the nearest horses were those he knew he could beat.

So he took another pull at Ambition and allowed the rest to creep up beside him, passing him at the end of the first mile.

He let none get quite ahead, but kept his place in the lead till the three horses were racing in a bunch for first place, the outside jockeys using their whips and tiring their horses in a vain endeavor to head Ambition, while Billy sat still in his saddle, let his horse travel on the inside track, and only shook the rein at the half-mile post, when one of his opponents was about to cross his track, just escaping a foul.

In this way passed the second mile; and at the beginning of the third, as Billy had foreseen, his opponents fell back and ceased to dispute the lead, while Ambition still went freely and responded to the bit more readily.

Then the boy looked round and saw the white cap of Feeny, the jockey, on the outside of the ruck, coming up to him hand over hand, at the middle of the third mile.

"Now we'll see," muttered the boy, as he stood up in his stirrups and loosened the curb-rein. "Go it, old boy!"

Ambition skimmed steadily on without a touch of the whip, and Billy heard the tramp of the ruck growing fainter as he left them. At the three-quarter pole he caught the crack of a whip behind, and then came a wild yell from the populace as Voyageur, under whip and spur, raced out of the ruck and ranged up beside Ambition at the beginning of the third mile.

"Now let 'em have it!" yelled the old jockey, excitedly. "We can clear 'em, boy! Let's give the folks a good race!"

"Beat me if you can!" cried Billy, laughing; and with that he laid the whip sharply on Ambition, Feeny yelling to Voyageur.

The cheering became louder and louder as the two famous horses swept round the course side by side, neither gaining a neck till the half-mile pole, when Feeny cried out to Billy:

"Five hundred dollars, boy, ye darned fool, to let me win! Don't ye hear?"

Billy shook his head, dug in his spurs, and yelled back:

"I'm offered double to win! Good-by, old man! Houp la! Houp!"

Whipping and spurring like maniacs, the two jockeys went side by side to the three-quarter mile, when Ambition leaped to the front, and in the same instant Voyageur "quit," in the emphatic slang of the turf.

He was doing his best, and could not stand the punishment Feeny was giving him, while Ambition had an extra spice of temper and courage, which made him put on another wild burst of speed. Then Billy saw the white cap drop back, heard the yell:

"Ambition wins! Ambition wins!"

And Ambition did win, all in a lather of white foam, ten lengths ahead of his nearest rival, Voyageur, the rest tailing behind so far that, out of a field of eleven starters, six were distanced, and twenty lengths separated the first from the third horse in the race, in a time that beat the record by half a second.

Then Billy was able to check his foaming horse at last, as Feeny reined up beside him, crying vindictively:

"I'll remember you for this! See if I don't. You ain't so smart as you think you was. That ar' bill's a bogus."

"You go to grass!" retorted Billy, sharply. "I don't keer what it is. You giv' it me to lose, and I fooled ye. Do yer darnedest. I'll tell the boss of this trick."

And then neither could say any more, for the crowd surged in on them, and Billy saw Colonel Plunger coming toward him, radiant with pleasure, holding out his hand to the boy and crying:

"Well done, Billee. Dat race was ridden like a hero by you. Come with me to the Governor. It is all right now."

He took the boy off the horse and led him to the members' stand, observed of all observers, while the stable-boys took away Ambition and blanketed that noble racer before taking him to the stable. Billy, blushing and awkward, hardly knowing whether he stood on his head or his heels, found himself in the midst of a crowd of well-dressed gentlemen and ladies, in the midst of whom the white hair and dignified face of his employer beamed graciously on him.

"Wandle, my boy," said the Governor, in his slow, ponderous way, "I have sent for you to thank you before these gentlemen for the masterly way in which you won this race, and to tell you that I shall not forget you. You are a good boy, and here is something to make you remember this day for awhile."

As the old gentleman spoke, he handed the boy a new hundred-dollar bill, and beamed on him as if he had done a wonderfully fine thing.

What was his astonishment therefore, when Billy Boots replied:

"Thank ye, sir. Might I ax you to see if that there bill's a true one or a bogus?"

As he spoke he hauled out the five hundred-dollar bill given him by Feeny, and handed it up to the Governor.

"Why, where in the name of sense did you get all that money?" asked the Governor, with a surprise and dismay that raised a covert smile on the faces of the bystanders. "I thought a hundred would be a fortune to you."

"Thank ye, sir," returned Billy. "Thank ye all the same. Is the bill good?"

"Here, Mr. Bloater, you're an expert," the Governor said to a fat gentleman near. "Is that bill good?"

Mr. Bloater was a banker, and he looked at the bill closely, when he said:

"Perfectly. It's on my own bank."

"And where did you get it?" asked Colonel Plunger suddenly, with a signal to the boy to speak out.

"Feeny—him as rode Voyageur—give it me, sir, afore the race, to throw it, and promised me another, if he won. Now he says it's bogus. That's all, sir. Reckon I'd better give it back to him, hadn't I?"

"By no means," gasped the Governor. "I'm amazed, confounded. Boy, do you mean to say you were bribed to lose the race by a brother jockey? Who gave him the money to do this?"

"Reckon 'twas the Boss Better, sir," the boy returned quietly.

"The Boss Better! Who is he?"

The Governor was not "up" in slang, but again a smile passed at his expense, and a gentleman near him observed:

"It's that man, Crooke, who bet so heavily with your friend the colonel. He's been pretty badly bitten to-day, and it's lucky the money was put up in old Pierre's hands, or it might be difficult raking it up to-day. I wonder what's become of him."

"He has run away," returned Colonel Plunger calmly. "But that must not prevent a thorough sifting of this affair to the bottom, gentlemen. Mr. Bloodgood, I submit that, as a member of this club, you are bound to bring charges against this man for trying to bribe your jockey to throw a race."

"Most assuredly I shall," said the old gentleman with a splutter; "why it's perfectly in-

famous. Who knows how many other races I've lost in the same way! Have you ever been bribed before, boy?"

"Yes, sir," returned Billy in a low tone.

"Indeed?"

The Governor was completely aghast, but Colonel Plunger interrupted:

"It is true, Governor, and I am the man that did it."

"You!" echoed Bloodgood amazedly. "You the man who—"

"Hush!" said the colonel sharply. "That is private business between you and me, Governor. This is another matter. It is true I paid the boy, and I paid him the last time he rode Ambition. Perhaps you remember it. The first race your horses won at this meeting. Let me tell you, you have been deceived ever since you went on the turf. Your trainer has been in league with this Crooke, and not one of your horses has had a fair chance till I came on the scene. You know what is my cause for trying to unmask that man. I have found my opportunity at last. Will you bring the charges or not?"

"Certainly I will," answered the Governor in a way that astonished the spectators, for he seemed to be positively afraid of the colonel for some reason.

"Then let us be silent till they come before the committee," said the colonel, "and it will be well to give the boy another bill, that we may produce this one before the club."

"I'll go and find the president at once," said the Governor. "Wandle, will you trust me with that bill?"

"Certainly, boss," said Billy, but with such evident reluctance that more than one smiled and old Bloater observed:

"Oh, give him another bill for it, Bloodgood. The boy's not used to having such sums in his possession and he wants to look at it now and then."

So the Governor, who hated to part with money, had to go down in his wallet and fish up enough money to make up five hundred dollars when he said in a stiff, reluctant way:

"There, there, you'll have to keep that. If this Feeny claims his money refer him to me, the graceless scoundrel. Come, colonel, we'll go and lay our complaint."

So Billy went away, while his employer and the colonel took their course to the office of the Jockey Club, where they lodged formal charges against Crooke for bribing the jockeys to throw races.

Meantime the other events of the day passed off as usual, and it was not till every one was returning home in the evening that they began to think of the outside world at all.

Then it forced itself on the notice of Colonel Plunger and Frank, who were returning home together in Frank's dog-cart, by the shouts of newsboys in the streets of Brooklyn yelling:

"Extry! Extry Telegram! Got the horrible murder in the Bong Tong Hotel! Extry! Got the horrible murder!"

"The Bon Ton Hotel!" repeated Frank. "Why, that's the place where madame lives. Good Heavens! I wonder—Here, boy! Paper!"

He pulled up with half a dozen boys rushing to sell, threw down a quarter without waiting for change, and said hastily to the colonel:

"Read it! Find what's the matter."

The colonel's face had assumed a grave expression as he took the paper and he read the "extra" as Frank drove on, turning graver all the time.

"Well, what is it?" asked Frank, in a tone of impatience. "Is she in it?"

"My boy," said the colonel, now without a trace of foreign accent, "your conjecture is correct. That rash woman has got into serious trouble, and the event has more concern with us than you think."

"With us?" echoed Frank.

"With us, through Crooke. You know I told you Crooke was her husband. So he was after a fashion. But he has never supported her, and she has led a wild life, while he has constantly sponged on her for money. A few days ago he married a woman who had promised to marry that little jockey of ours. He did it to influence the boy, reckless of the crime of bigamy. But he forgot one thing. In all of Coralie's wild life she has kept at heart a furious jealousy of her scamp of a husband, and two nights ago she saw him with his new wife. She tried to get the address out of me, but I knew her too well. I would not tell her. Now it seems she must have

found it out, for the two women have met, and Coralie has murdered the other. Listen."

He read out the extra as follows:

"This morning, at eleven o'clock, the waiters at the Bon Bon Hotel were startled by screams proceeding from the rooms of Madame St. Aure, the equestrian in the circus which opened yesterday. At first they thought it was only a practical joke, for St. Aure was known to have very loud people in her rooms at all times, but when they heard the cry of 'murder' in a woman's voice four or five rushed to the room, broke open the door, and found Madame looking wild and excited standing over the body of a small, pretty blonde woman whom she had just stabbed no less than six times with the half of a small pair of scissors. The poor girl was quite dead, and St. Aure apparently a raving maniac, for it required the strength of four men to hold and disarm her. During the struggle two of the waiters were stabbed. The origin of the trouble is shrouded in mystery; the name of the victim unknown at first, but on her body was found a marriage certificate between Mary Madden and Philip Lester. Madame was taken to the police station, and Coroner Britt summoned a jury at once to sit on the dead body. The police are looking for Lester, the husband of the dead woman. When he is found the mystery will probably be revealed."

Frank said nothing as he listened, till the colonel finished, when he observed:

"That's strange. Philip Lester was the name of that man who wrecked my poor uncle's life so many years ago. Is it possible Crooke can be the same?"

The colonel laid his hand on his arm.

"My boy, is it possible you do not see the truth?"

Frank stared.

"The truth! What truth?"

"That Lester and Crooke are one."

"But Lester had a scar, Crooke has none. Lester was thin and wiry; Crooke is stout and burly."

"The scar is on his face yet, but he has learned how to paint it out. His growth of flesh aids his disguise. Do you not remember how confused he was in the Decade Club when I told him of the man Lester in California? He knew he was the man, and that I knew it, too."

"But how in the world did you know him? Were you ever in California?"

"I was."

"But I thought you were in the French army, colonel. How—"

"How came I in California?"

"Yes."

"It is a long story. But is it possible once more that you have not yet seen who I am?"

Frank started violently.

"You? Good heavens, no! What do you mean by that? You know Lester? You found him out at the club in the very same trick—Colonel, colonel, tell me I'm dreaming. I seem to see something coming out. Am I dreaming it? It seems too wonderful."

"You are not dreaming, my boy. On the contrary, you are waking up at last to reality. Frank, Frank, did you think it natural for a total stranger, a mere soldier comrade of your father, to take in you the interest I have done? Can you not see who I am yet?"

Frank was trembling violently, as he answered in a low tone:

"I see it now, sir, and I see how blind I have been. You are Paul Malcolm."

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONCLUSION.

BUT little remains to tell of this story which the reader has not already long since divined.

Paul Malcolm, the outcast of twenty years before, had indeed returned to his old home, reformed by adversity, able to live in luxury by his own labors, and independent of the fortune alienated from him by his father.

The very qualities which, unregulated, had led to his ruin as a young man, had proved his salvation under the teachings of hard, bitter adversity.

He had been brimful of physical strength and mental energy, with a craving for excitement that had led him into all sorts of dissipation as a young man. As a soldier of fortune those qualities had led him to success.

He told his story some time after when he and Frank were sitting at the table of Governor Bloodgood, all parties reunited at last; even the two lovers reconciled.

"You never knew, Frank," he said, "that the Governor here has been my legal adviser in days of old. It was a fact. To him alone I confided, after I had sounded him thoroughly, my story after I came back. I told it to him on the night before the four-mile race, and he laid with me the plan to expel Lester, and

ruin him as he had ruined me. It was his money that I wagered on Ambition, and he would not touch one penny of the winnings."

"But how came it that you were said to be dead?" asked Frank.

"I spread the report myself and sunk my own identity. I knew that I had failed to prove Lester's villainy and that my name would always be associated with failure, so I took advantage of a wound received in a battle in Mexico, and had my death announced, while in reality I left the country. I did enter the French army, but only in the foreign legion where I served long enough to learn the language and pass for a Frenchman. Then I got a leave of absence, went to California, and found Lester there under the name of Sharply. I knew him, but he did not know me, for I had changed much and he thought Paul Malcolm was dead. As Sharply I exposed him there, and he was ordered out of the country by the Vigilance Committee. I then thought he was drowned at sea, and it was not till I came to New York this time that I ascertained the reverse. Meantime I had made money in California and I made more in Mexico, finally returning to France, where I made most of all by speculating in Mexican bonds on the French Bourse. At last, having made a fortune for one in my lonely state, I determined to come here and look up my remaining relatives. I came here and the first person I saw on the race-course at Squantum Bay was the evil genius of our family now under the name of Crooke, trying on you the same arts he had once tried on me. I was actually appalled by your likeness to myself at your age even more than to your father. I determined to save you at any hazard from my errors, and you know how I succeeded. At last, at the Decade Club, I found the opportunity to prove the trick of twenty years ago, and I proved it. That evening for the first time Lester knew who I was and from that moment he feared me. As the Californian he could have tried to fight me, but as Paul Malcolm, he knew he was in my power."

"Then why did you not expose him that night as Lester?" asked Frank.

"Because to expose him would have been to leave him his money and I was determined to beggar him before I drove him from society. The race offered the opportunity for one, and my knowledge of his plans for the other. I knew Coralie had married him in Paris, when he was still Philip Lester, with no stain on his name. I found that he had married this other poor girl and I knew I could have him arrested for bigamy and revealed to the world at any time. Coralie's wild jealousy hurried on the ending. It seems that she decoyed that poor girl to her rooms by a message, got into a violent quarrel with her and stabbed her in a passion. All the same, the truth has come out on the inquest, and Lester has fled the city. He will hardly come up again, as he has done twice in twenty years as a sporting man in first class society. Ten years hence, if he can alter his appearance again he will be past fifty and his energy gone. He can do no further harm to society. I have accomplished my task, punished him and saved you from following in my track."

"And now, sir," said Frank, "it only remains for me to execute the wish of my father, and give up to you the half of my grandfather's property which should be yours of right. Governor, have you delivered my uncle the deeds?"

Governor Bloodgood smiled in his dignified and patronizing way.

"I have as you requested, Mr. Noble, and I have the pleasure to tell you that your uncle has at once made over his share to a person in whom I take a great interest on certain not very hard conditions."

"What do you mean?" asked Frank, puzzled.

"Suppose we adjourn to the drawing-room," suggested Paul Malcolm, as the Governor hesitated. "We can discuss the matter, there, better."

They found Fanny in the drawing-room, and Paul Malcolm led Frank up to her, saying:

"Miss Bloodgood, will you kindly show this gentleman the deed I gave you to-day?"

"I won't do any such thing," retorted the young lady, turning scarlet. "I don't want anything to do with the affair. I didn't ask for it."

"All the same," interrupted her father, in his blandly ponderous way, "it is not a thing

to be thrown away. I will tell Mr. Noble myself."

Then he turned to Frank:

"Mr. Noble, your uncle it seems has enough for his wants—at least he thinks he has, and only accepts your gift on condition that he be allowed to turn it over to this young lady here."

"To Miss Bloodgood?" echoed Frank.

"Yes, sir, but again on certain not very hard conditions—"

"Now, papa, I won't, I won't, I won't stay here to hear the rest of it," cried Fanny, impetuously starting up. "It's not proper—it's—I shall leave the room if you go on."

The Governor chuckled.

"You can certainly do that, my dear," he said, "but as this is a matter of legal business affecting Mr. Noble I must explain it to him."

"Then explain when I'm gone," said Fanny, now perfectly crimson, and out of the room she ran in a way she had never run before, while Frank turned from one to the other completely astounded.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

"It means, my boy," said Paul Malcolm gravely, "that I have accepted your father's generosity but cannot retain it. I have deeded away all the half of the property you deeded to me, to Miss Fanny Bloodgood on condition that she marries you. Are you willing to ask her?"

"Willing?" echoed Frank. "Why, sir, I would give half my life if she would consent to be my wife."

"Very well," said Governor Bloodgood with another chuckle, "settle it between you, while Malcolm and I go down to smoke a cigar."

And when they came back an hour later, they found two people in the drawing-room, one of whom rose up and said in the voice of Frank:

"Governor, uncle Paul, congratulate me. It is all settled and I'm the happiest man alive."

THE END.

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